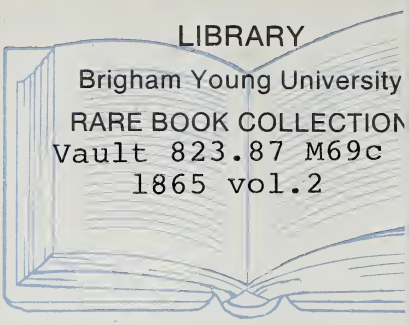
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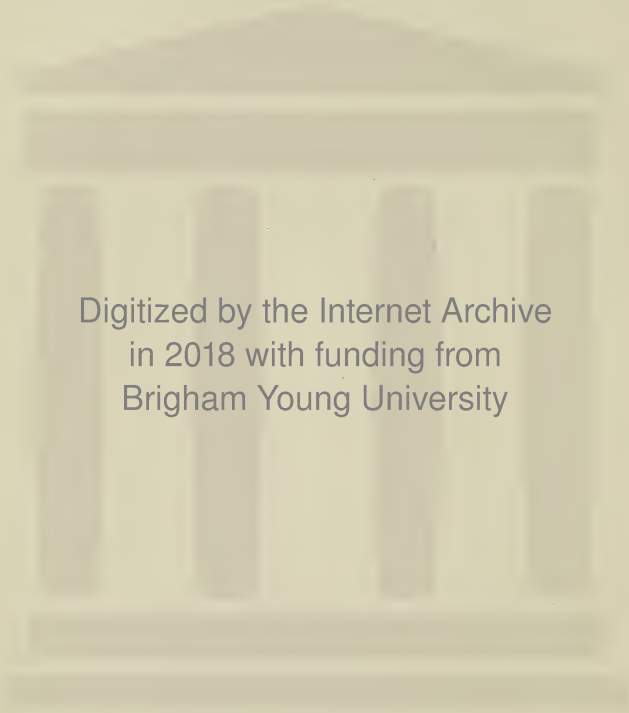
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MISS MACKENZIE.

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MISS MACKENZIE.

CHAPTER I.

LADY BALL'S GRIEVANCE.

Miss Mackenzie, before she left Gower Street, was forced to make some arrangements as to her affairs at Littlebath, and these were ultimately settled in a manner that was not altogether palatable to her. Mr. Rubb was again sent down, having Susanna in his charge, and he was empowered to settle with Miss Mackenzie's landlady and give up the lodgings. There was much that was disagreeable in this. Miss Mackenzie having just rejected Mr. Rubb's suit, did not feel quite comfortable in giving him a commission to see all her stockings and petticoats packed up and brought away from the lodgings. Indeed, she could give him no commission of the kind, but intimated her intention of writing to the lodging-house keeper. He, however, was profuse in his assurances that nothing should be left behind, and if Miss Mackenzie would tell him anything of the

way in which the things ought to be packed, he would be so happy to attend to her! To him Miss Mackenzie would give no such instructions, but doubtless, she gave many to Susanna.

As to Susanna, it was settled that she should remain as a boarder at the Littlebath school, at any rate, for the next half-year. After that there might be great doubt whether her aunt could bear the expense of maintaining her in such a position.

Miss Mackenzie had reconciled herself to going to the Cedars because she would thus have an opportunity of seeing her lawyer and arranging about her property, whereas had she been down at Littlebath there would have been a difficulty. And she wanted some one whom she could trust to act for her, some one besides the lawyer, and she thought that she could trust her cousin, John Ball. As to getting away from all her suitors that was impossible. Had she gone to Littlebath there was one there; had she remained with her sister-in-law, she would have been always near another; and, on going to the Cedars, she would meet the third. But she could not on that account absolutely isolate herself from everybody that she knew in the world. And, perhaps, she was getting somewhat used to her suitors, and less liable than she had been to any fear that they could force her into action against her own consent. So

she went to the Cedars, and, on arriving there, received from her uncle and aunt but a moderate amount of condolence as to the death of her brother.

Her first and second days in her aunt's house were very quiet. Nothing was said of John's former desires, and nothing about her own money or her brother's family. On the morning of the third day she told her cousin that she would, on the next morning, accompany him to town if he would allow her. "I am going to Mr. Slow's," said she, "and perhaps you could go with me." To this he assented willingly, and then, after a pause, surmised that her visit must probably have reference to the sale of her houses to the railway company. "Partly to that," she said, "but it chiefly concerns arrangements for my brother's family."

To this John Ball said nothing, nor did Lady Ball, who was present, then speak. But Miss Mackenzie could see that her aunt looked at her cousin, opening her eyes, and expressing concern. John Ball himself allowed no change to come upon his face, but went on deliberately with his bread and butter. "I shall be very happy to go with you," he said, "and will either come and call for you when you have done, or stay with you while you are there, just as you like."

"I particularly want you to stay with me,"

said she, "and as we go up to town I will tell you all about it."

She observed that before her cousin left the house on that day, his mother got hold of him and was alone with him for nearly half an hour. After that, Lady Ball was alone with Sir John, in his own room, for another half hour. The old baronet had become older, of course, and much weaker, since his niece had last been at the Cedars, and was now seldom seen about the house till the afternoon.

Of all the institutions at the Cedars that of the carriage was the most important. Miss Mackenzie found that the carriage arrangements had been fixed upon a new and more settled basis since her last visit. Then it used to go out perhaps as often as three times a week. But there did not appear to be any fixed rule. Like other carriages, it did, to a certain degree, come when it was wanted. But now there was, as I have said, a settled basis. The carriage came to the door on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, exactly at two o'clock, and Sir John with Lady Ball were driven about till four.

On the first Monday of her visit Miss Mackenzie had gone with her uncle and aunt, and even she had found the pace to be very slow, and the whole affair to be very dull. Her uncle had once enlivened the thing by asking her whether

she had found any lovers since she went to Little-bath, and this question had perplexed her very much. She could not say that she had found none, and as she was not prepared to acknowledge that she had found any, she could only sit still and blush.

"Women have plenty of lovers when they have plenty of money," said the baronet.

"I don't believe that Margaret thinks of anything of the kind," said Lady Ball.

After that Margaret determined to have as little to do with the carriage as possible, and on that evening she learned from her cousin that the horses had been sold to the man who farmed the land, and were hired every other day for two hours' work.

It was on the Thursday morning that Miss Mackenzie had spoken of going into town on the morrow, and on that day when her aunt asked her about the driving, she declined.

"I hope that nothing your uncle said on Tuesday annoyed you?"

"Oh dear no; but if you don't mind it, I'd rather stay at home."

"Of course you shall if you like it," said her aunt; "and by-the-bye, as I want to speak to you, and as we might not find time after coming home, if you don't mind it I'll do it now."

Of course Margaret said that she did not mind

it, though in truth she did mind it, and was afraid of her aunt.

"Well then, Margaret, look here. I want to know something about your brother's affairs. From what I have heard, I fear they were not very good."

"They were very bad, aunt;—very bad indeed."

"Dear, dear; you don't say so. Sir John always feared that it would be so when Thomas Mackenzie mixed himself up with those Rubbs. And there has gone half of Jonathan Ball's money;—money which Sir John made! Well, well!"

Miss Mackenzie had nothing to say to this; and as she had nothing to say to it she sat silent, making no attempt at any words.

"It does seem hard; don't it, my dear?"

"It wouldn't make any difference to anybody now;—to my uncle, I mean, or to John, if the money was not gone."

"That's quite true; quite true; only it does seem to be a pity. However the half of Jonathan's money which you have got, is not lost, and there's some comfort in that."

Miss Mackenzie was not called upon to make any answer to this; for although she had lost a large sum of money by lending it to her brother, nevertheless she was still possessed of a larger

sum of money than that which her brother Walter had received from Jonathan Ball.

"And what are they going to do, my dear;—the children, I mean, and the widow? I suppose there'll be something for them out of the business?"

"I don't think there'll be anything, aunt. As far as I can understand there will be nothing certain. They may probably get a hundred and twenty-five pounds a-year." This she named, as being the interest of the money she had lent,—or given.

"A hundred and twenty-five pounds a-year. That isn't much, but it will keep them from absolute want."

"Would it, aunt?"

"Oh, yes; at least, I suppose so. I hope she's a good manager. She ought to be, for she's a very disagreeable woman. You told me that yourself, you know."

Then Miss Mackenzie, having considered for one moment, resolved to make a clean breast of it all, and this she did with the fewest possible words.

"I'm going to divide what I've got with them, and I hope it will make them comfortable."

"What!" exclaimed her aunt.

"I'm going to give Sarah half what I've got, for her and her children. I shall have enough to live on left."

"Margaret, you don't mean it?"

"Not mean it? why not, aunt? You would not have me let them starve. Besides, I promised my brother when he was dying."

"Then I must say he was very wrong, very wicked I may say, to exact any such promise from you; and no such promise is binding. If you ask Sir John, or your lawyer, they will tell you so. What! exact a promise from you to the amount of half your income! It was very wrong."

"But, aunt, I should do the same if I had made no promise."

"No, you wouldn't, my dear. Your friends wouldn't let you. And indeed your friends must prevent it now. They will not hear of such a sacrifice being made."

"But, aunt——"

"Well, my dear."

"It's my own, you know." And Margaret, as she said this, plucked up her courage, and looked her aunt full in the face.

"Yes, it is your own, by law; but I don't suppose, my dear, that you are of that disposition or that character that you'd wish to set all the world at defiance, and make everybody belonging to you feel that you had disgraced yourself."

"Disgraced myself by relieving my brother's family!"

"Disgraced yourself by giving to that woman

money that has come to you as your fortune has come. Think of it, where it came from!"

"It came to me from my brother Walter."

"And where did he get it? And who made it? And don't you know that your brother Tom had his share of it, and wasted it all? Did it not all come from the Balls? And yet you think so little of that, that you are going to let that woman rob you of it;—rob you and my grandchildren; for that, I tell you, is the way in which the world will look at it. Perhaps you don't know it, but all that property was as good as given to John at one time. Who was it first took you by the hand when you were left all alone in Arundel Street? Oh, Margaret, don't go and be such an ungrateful, foolish creature!"

Margaret waited for a moment, and then she answered;—

"There's nobody so near to me as my own brother's children."

"As to that, Margaret, there isn't much difference in nearness between your uncle and your nephews and nieces. But there's a right and a wrong in these things, and when money is concerned, people are not justified in indulging their fancies. Everything here has been told to you. You know how John is situated with his children. And after what there has been between you and him, and after what there still might be

if you would have it so, I own that I am astonished,—fairly astonished. Indeed, my dear, I can only look on it as simple weakness on your part. It was but the other day that you told me you had done all that you thought necessary by your brother in taking Susanna."

"But that was when he was alive, and I thought he was doing well."

"The fact is, you have been there and they've talked you over. It can't be that you love children that you never saw till the other day; and as for the woman, you always hated her."

"Whether I love her or hate her has nothing to do with it."

"Margaret, will you promise me this, that you will see Mr. Slow and talk to him about it before you do anything?"

"I must see Mr. Slow before I can do anything; but whatever he says, I shall do it all the same."

"Will you speak to your uncle?"

"I had rather not."

"You are afraid to tell him of this; but of course he must be told. Will you speak to John?"

"Certainly; I meant to do so going to town to-morrow."

And if he tells you you are wrong——"

"Aunt, I know I am not wrong. It is nonsense to say that I am wrong in——"

"That's respectful, Margaret!"

"I don't want to be disrespectful, aunt; but in such a case as this I know that I have a right to do what I like with my own money. If I was going to give it away to any other friend, if I was going to marry, or anything like that," — she blushed at the remembrance of the iniquities she had half intended as she said this, "then there might be some reason for you to scold me; but with a brother and a brother's family it can't be wrong. If you had a brother, and had been with him when he was dying, and he had left his wife and children looking to you, you would have done the same."

Upon this Lady Ball got up from her chair and walked to the door. Margaret had been more impetuous, and had answered her with much more confidence than she had expected. She was determined now to say one more word, but so to say it that it should not be answered;—to strike one more blow, but so to strike it that it should not be returned.

"Margaret," she said, as she stood with the door open in her hands, "if you will reflect where the money came from, your conscience will tell you without much difficulty where it should go to. And when you think of your brother's children,

whom this time last year you had hardly seen, think also of John Ball's children, who have welcomed you into this house as their dearest relative. In one sense, certainly, the money is yours, Margaret; but in another sense, and that the highest sense, it is not yours to do what you please with it."

Then Lady Ball shut the door rather loudly, and sailed away along the hall. When the passages were clear, Miss Mackenzie made her way up into her own room, and saw none of the family till she came down just before dinner.

She sat for a long time in the chair by her bedside thinking of her position. Was it true after all that she was bound by a sense of justice to give any of her money to the Balls? It was true that in one sense it had been taken from them, but she had had nothing to do with that taking. If her brother Walter had married and had children, then the Balls would not have expected the money back again. It was ever so many years,—five-and-twenty years, and more,—since the legacy had been made by Jonathan Ball to her brother, and it seemed to her that her aunt had no common sense on her side in the argument. Was it possible that she should allow her own nephews and nieces to starve while she was rich? She had, moreover, made a promise,—a promise to one who was now dead, and there was

a solemnity in that which carried everything else before it. Even though the thing might be unjust, still she must do it.

But she was to give only half her fortune to her brother's family; there would still be the half left for herself, for herself or for these Balls if they wanted it so sorely. She was beginning to hate her money. It had brought to her nothing but tribulation and disappointment. Had Walter left her a hundred a year, she would, not having then dreamed of higher things, have been amply content. Would it not be better that she should take for herself some modest competence, something on which she might live without trouble to her relatives, without trouble to her friends, she had first said,—but as she did so she told herself with scorn that friends she had none—and then let the Balls have what was left after she had kept her promise to her brother? Anything would be better than such persecution as that to which her aunt had subjected her.

At last she made up her mind to speak of it all openly to her cousin. She had an idea that in such matters men were more trustworthy than women, and perhaps less greedy. Her cousin would, she thought, be more just to her than her aunt had been. That her aunt had been very unjust,—cruel and unjust,—she felt assured.

She came down to dinner, and she could see by

the manners of them all that the matter had been discussed since John Ball's return from London. Jack, the eldest son, was not at home, and the three girls who came next to Jack dined with their father and grandfather. To them Margaret endeavoured to talk easily, but she failed. They had never been favourites with her as Jack was, and, on this occasion, she could get very little from them that was satisfactory to her. John Ball was courteous to her, but he was very silent throughout the whole evening. Her aunt showed her displeasure by not speaking to her, or speaking barely with a word. Her uncle, of whose voice she was always in fear, seemed to be more cross, and when he did speak, more sarcastic than ever. He asked her whether she intended to go back to Littlebath.

"I think not," said she.

"Then that has been a failure, I suppose," said the old man.

"Everything is a failure, I think," said she, with tears in her eyes.

This was in the drawing-room, and immediately her cousin John came and sat by her. He came and sat there, as though he had intended to speak to her; but he went away again in a minute or two without having uttered a word. Things went on in the same way till they moved off to bed, and then the formal adieus for the night were made

with a coldness that amounted, on the part of Lady Ball, almost to inhospitality.

"Good night, Margaret," she said, as she just put out the tip of her finger.

"Good night, my dear," said Sir John. "I don't know what's the matter with you, but you look as though you'd been doing something that you were ashamed of."

Lady Ball was altogether injudicious in her treatment of her niece. As to Sir John, it made probably very little difference. Miss Mackenzie had perceived, when she first came to the Cedars, that he was a cross old man, and that he had to be endured as such by any one who chose to go into that house. But she had depended on Lady Ball for kindness of manner, and had been tempted to repeat her visits to the house because her aunt had, after her fashion, been gracious to her. But now there was rising in her breast a feeling that she had better leave the Cedars as soon as she could, shake the dust off her feet, and see nothing more of the Balls. Even the Rubb connection seemed to her to be better than the Ball connection, and less exaggerated in its greediness. Were it not for her cousin John, she would have resolved to go on the morrow. She would have faced the indignation of her aunt, and the cutting taunts of her uncle, and have taken herself off at once to some lodging in

London. But John Ball had meant to be kind to her when he came and sat close to her on the sofa and her soft heart relented towards him.

Lady Ball had in truth mistaken her niece's character. She had found her to be unobtrusive, gentle, and unselfish; and had conceived that she must therefore be weak and compliant. As to many things she was compliant, and as to some things she was weak; but there was in her composition a power of resistance and self-sustenance on which Lady Ball had not counted. When conscious of absolute ill-usage, she could fight well, and would not bow her neck to any Mrs. Stumfold or to any Lady Ball.

CHAPTER II.

MR. SLOW'S CHAMBERS.

She came down late to breakfast on the following morning, not being present at prayers, and when she came down she wore her bonnet.

"I got myself ready, John, for fear I should keep you waiting."

Her aunt spoke to her somewhat more graciously than on the preceding evening, and accepted her apology for being late.

Just as she was about to start Lady Ball took her apart and spoke one word to her.

"No one can tell you better what you ought to do than your cousin John; but pray remember that he is far too generous to say a word for himself."

Margaret made no answer, and then she and her cousin started on foot across the grounds to the station. The distance was nearly a mile, and during the walk no word was said between them about money. They got into the train that was

to take them up to London, and sat opposite to each other. It happened that there was no passenger in either of the seats next to him or her, so that there was ample opportunity for them to hold a private conversation; but Mr. Ball said nothing to her, and she, not knowing how to begin, said nothing to him. In this way they reached the London station at Waterloo Bridge, and then he asked her what she proposed to do next.

"Shall we go to Mr. Slow's at once?" she asked.

To this he assented, and at her proposition they agreed to walk to the lawyer's chambers. These were on the north side of Lincoln's Inn Fields, near the Turnstile, and Mr. Ball remarked that the distance was again not much above a mile. So they crossed the Strand together, and made their way by narrow streets into Drury Lane, and then under a certain archway into Lincoln's Inn Fields.

To Miss Mackenzie, who felt that something ought to be said, the distance and time occupied seemed to be very short.

"Why, this is Lincoln's Inn Fields!" she exclaimed, as she came out upon the west side.

"Yes; this is Lincoln's Inn Fields, and Mr. Slow's chambers are over there."

She knew well where Mr. Slow's chambers

were situated, but she paused on the pavement, not wishing to go thither quite at once.

"John," she said, "I thought that perhaps we might have talked over all this before we saw Mr. Slow."

"Talked over all what?"

"About the money that I want to give to my brother's family. Did not my aunt tell you of it?"

"Yes; she told me that you and she had differed."

"And she told you what about?"

"Yes," said he, slowly; "she told me what about."

"And what ought I to do, John?"

As she asked the question she caught hold of the lappet of his coat, and looked up into his face as though supplicating him to give her the advantage of all his discretion and all his honesty.

They were still standing on the pavement, where the street comes out from under the archway. She was gazing into his face, and he was looking away from her over towards the inner railings of the square, with heavy brow and dull eye and motionless face. She was very eager, and he seemed to be simply patient, but nevertheless he was working hard with his thoughts, striving to determine how best he might answer

her. His mother had told him that he might model this woman to his will, and had repeated to him that story which he had heard so often of the wrong that had been done to him by his uncle Jonathan. It may be said that there was no need for such repetition, as John Ball had himself always thought quite enough of that injury. He had thought of it for the last twenty years, almost hourly, till it was graven upon his very soul. He had been a ruined, wretched, moody man, because of his uncle Jonathan's will. There was no need, one would have said, to have stirred him on that subject. But his mother, on this morning, in the ten minutes before prayer-time, had told him of it all again, and had told him also that the last vestige of his uncle's money would now disappear from him unless he interfered to save it.

"On this very day it must be saved; and she will do anything you tell her," said his mother. "She regards you more than anyone else. If you were to ask her again now, I believe she would accept you this very day. At any rate, do not let those people have her money."

And yet he had not spoken to Margaret on the subject during the journey, and would now have taken her to the lawyer's chambers without a word, had she not interrupted him and stopped him.

Nevertheless he had been thinking of his uncle, and his uncle's will, and his uncle's money, throughout the morning. He was thinking of it at that moment when she stopped him,—thinking how hard it all was, how cruel that those people in the New Road should have had and spent half his uncle's fortune, and that now the remainder, which at one time had seemed to be near the reach of his own children, should also go to atone for the negligence and fraud of those wretched Rubbs.

We all know with how strong a bias we regard our own side in any question, and he regarded his side in this question with a very strong bias. Nevertheless he had refrained from a word, and would have refrained, had she not stopped him.

When she took hold of him by the coat, he looked for a moment into her face, and thought that in its trouble it was very sweet. She leaned somewhat against him as she spoke, and he wished that she would lean against him altogether. There was about her a quiet power of endurance, and at the same time a comeliness and a womanly softness which seemed to fit her altogether for his wants and wishes. As he looked with his dull face across into the square, no physiognomist would have declared of him that at that moment he was suffering from love, or thinking of a woman that was dear to him. But it was so with

him, and the physiognomist, had one been there, would have been wrong. She had now asked him a question, which he was bound to answer in some way—"What ought I to do, John?"

He turned slowly round and walked with her, away from their destination, round by the south side of the square, and then up along the blank wall on the east side, nearly to the passage into Holborn, and back again all round the enclosed space. She, while she was speaking to him and listening to him, hardly remembered where she was or whither she was going.

"I thought," said he, in answer to her question, "that you intended to ask Mr. Slow's advice?"

"I didn't mean to do more than tell him what should be done. He is not a friend, you know, John?"

"It's customary to ask lawyers their advice on such subjects."

"I'd rather have yours, John. But, in truth, what I want you to say is, that I am right in doing this;—right in keeping my promise to my brother, and providing for his children."

"Like most people, Margaret, you want to be advised to follow your own counsels."

"God knows that I want to do right, John. I want to do nothing else, John, but what's right. As to this money, I care but little for it for myself."

"It is your own, and you have a right to enjoy it."

"I don't know much about enjoyment. As to enjoyment, it seems to me to be pretty much the same whether a person is rich or poor. I always used to hear that money brought care, and I'm sure I've found it so since I had any."

"You've got no children, Margaret."

"No; but there are all those orphans. Am I not bound to look upon them as mine, now that he has gone? If they don't depend on me, whom are they to depend on?"

"If your mind is made up, Margaret, I have nothing to say against it. You know what my wishes are. They are just the same now as when you were last with us. It isn't only for the money I say this, though, of course, that must go a long way with a man circumstanced as I am; but, Margaret, I love you dearly, and if you can make up your mind to be my wife, I would do my best to make you happy."

"I hadn't meant you to talk in that way, John," said Margaret.

But she was not much flurried. She was now so used to these overtures that they did not come to her as much out of the common way. And she gave herself none of that personal credit which women are apt to take to themselves when they find that they are often sought in marriage. She

looked upon her lovers as so many men to whom her income would be convenient, and felt herself to be almost under an obligation to them for their willingness to put up with the incumbrance which was attached to it.

"But it's the only way I can talk when you ask me about this," said he. Then he paused for a moment before he added, "How much is it you wish to give to your brother's widow?"

"Half what I've got left?"

"Got left! You haven't lost any of your money; have you, Margaret?"

Then she explained to him the facts as to the loan, and took care to explain to him also, very fully, the compensatory fact of the purchase by the railway company. "And my promise to him was made after I had lent it, you know," she urged.

"I do think it ought to be deducted; I do indeed," he said. "I am not speaking in my own behalf now, or for the sake of my children, but simply as a man of business. As for myself, though I do think I have been hardly used in the matter of my uncle's money, I'll try to forget it. I'll try at any rate to do without it. When I first knew you, and found,—found that I liked you so much, I own that I did have hopes. But if it must not be, there shall be an end of that. The children won't starve, I suppose."

"Oh, John!"

"As for me, I won't hanker after your money. But, for your own sake, Margaret——"

"There will be more than enough for me, you know; and, John——"

She was going to make him some promise; to tell him something of her intention towards his son, and to make some tender of assistance to himself; being now in that mind to live on the smallest possible pittance, of which I have before spoken, when he ceased speaking or listening, and hurried her on to the attorney's chambers.

"Do what you like with it. It is your own," said he. "And we shall do no good by talking about it any longer out here."

So at last they made their way up to Mr. Slow's rooms, on the first floor in the old house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and were informed that that gentleman was at home. Would they be pleased to sit down in the waiting-room?

There is, I think, no sadder place in the world than the waiting-room attached to an attorney's chambers in London. In this instance it was a three-cornered room, which had got itself wedged in between the house which fronted to Lincoln's Inn Fields and some buildings in a narrow lane that ran at the back of the row. There was no carpet in it, and hardly any need of one, as the greater part of the floor was strewed with bundles of dusty papers. There was a window in it, which

looked out from the point of the further angle against the wall of the opposite building. The dreariness of this aspect had been thought to be too much for the minds of those who waited, and therefore the bottom panes had been clouded, so that there was in fact no power of looking out at all. Over the fireplace there was a table of descents and relationship, showing how heirship went; and the table was very complicated, describing not only the heirship of ordinary real and personal property, but also explaining the wonderful difficulties of gavelkind, and other mysteriously traditional laws. But the table was as dirty as it was complicated, and the ordinary waiting reader could make nothing of it. There was a small table in the room, near the window, which was always covered with loose papers; but these loose papers were on this occasion again covered with sheets of parchment, and a pale-faced man, of about thirty, whose beard had never yet attained power to do more than sprout, was sitting at the table, and poring over the parchments. Round the room, on shelves, there was a variety of iron boxes, on which were written the names of Mr. Slow's clients;—of those clients whose property justified them in having special boxes of their own. But these boxes were there, it must be supposed, for temporary purposes,—purposes which might be described as almost per-

manently temporary,—for those boxes which were allowed to exist in absolute permanence of retirement, were kept in an iron room down-stairs, the trap-door into which had yawned upon Miss Mackenzie as she was shown into the waiting-room. There was, however, one such box open, on the middle of the floor, and sundry of the parchments which had been taken from it were lying around it.

There were but two chairs in the room besides the one occupied by the man at the table, and these were taken by John Ball and his cousin. She sat herself down, armed with patience, indifferent to the delay and indifferent to the dusty ugliness of everything around her, as women are on such occasions. He, thinking much of his time, and somewhat annoyed at being called upon to wait, sat with his chin resting on his umbrella between his legs, and as he did so he allowed his eyes to roam around among the names upon the boxes. There was nothing on any one of those up on the shelves that attracted him. There was the Marquis of B——, and Sir C. D——, and the Dowager Countess of E——. Seeing this, he speculated mildly whether Mr. Slow put forward the boxes of his aristocratic customers to show how well he was doing in the world. But presently his eye fell from the shelf and settled upon the box on the floor. There, on that box, he saw the name of Walter Mackenzie.

This did not astonish him, as he immediately said to himself that these papers were being searched with reference to the business on which his cousin was there that day; but suddenly it occurred to him that Margaret had given him to understand that Mr. Slow did not expect her. He stepped over to her, therefore, one step over the papers, and asked her the question, whispering it into her ear.

"No," said she, "I had no appointment. I don't think he expects me."

He returned to his seat, and again sitting down with his chin on the top of his umbrella, surveyed the parchments that lay upon the ground. Upon one of them, that was not far from his feet, he read the outer endorsement, written as such endorsements always are, in almost illegible old English letters;—

"Jonathan Ball, to John Ball, junior,—Deed of Gift."

But, after all, there was nothing more than a coincidence in this. Of course Mr. Slow would have in his possession all the papers appertaining to the transfer of Jonathan Ball's property to the Mackenzies; or, at any rate, such as referred to Walter's share of it. Indeed, Mr. Slow, at the time of Jonathan Ball's death, acted for the two brothers, and it was probable that all the papers would be with him. John Ball had known

that there had been some intention on his uncle's part, before the quarrel between his father and his uncle, to make over to him, on his coming of age, a certain property in London, and he had been told that the money which the Mackenzies had inherited had ultimately come from this very property. His uncle had been an eccentric, quarrelsome man, prone to change his mind often, and not regardful of money as far as he himself was concerned. John Ball remembered to have heard that his uncle had intended him to become possessed of certain property in his own right the day that he became of age, and that this had all been changed because of the quarrel which had taken place between his uncle and his father. His father now never spoke of this, and for many years past had seldom mentioned it. But from his mother he had often heard of the special injury which he had undergone.

"His uncle," she had said, "had given it, and had taken it back again;—had taken it back that he might waste in on those Mackenzies."

All this he had heard very often, but he had never known anything of a deed of gift. Was it not singular, he thought, that the draft of such a deed should be lying at his foot at this moment.

He showed nothing of this in his face, and still sat there with his chin resting on his umbrella. But certainly stronger ideas than usual of the

great wrongs which he had suffered did come into his head as he looked upon the paper at his feet. He began to wonder whether he would be justified in taking it up and inspecting it. But as he was thinking of this the pale-faced man rose from his chair, and after moving among the papers on the ground for an instant, selected this very document, and carried it with him to his table. Mr. Ball, as his eyes followed the parchment, watched the young man dust it and open it, and then having flattened it with his hand, glance over it till he came to a certain spot. The pale-faced clerk, accustomed to such documents, glanced over the ambages, the "whereases," the "aforesaids," the rich exuberance of "admors.," "exors.," and "assigns," till he deftly came to the pith of the matter, and then he began to make extracts, a date here and a date there. John Ball watched him all the time, till the door was opened, and old Mr. Slow himself appeared in the room.

He stepped across the papers to shake hands with his client, and then shook hands also with Mr. Ball, whom he knew. His eye glanced at once down to the box, and after that over towards the pale-faced clerk. Mr. Ball perceived that the attorney had joined in his own mind the operation that was going on with these special documents, and the presence of these two special visitors; and that he, in some measure, regretted the coin-

cidence. There was something wrong, and John Ball began to consider whether the old lawyer could be an old scoundrel. Some lawyers, he knew, were desperate scoundrels. He said nothing, however; but, obeying Mr. Slow's invitation, followed him and his cousin into the sanctum sanctorum of the chambers.

"They didn't tell me you were here at first," said the lawyer, in a tone of vexation, "or I wouldn't have had you shown in there."

John Ball thought that this was, doubtless, true, and that very probably they might not have been put in among those papers had Mr. Slow known what was being done.

"The truth is," continued the lawyer, "the Duke of F——'s man of business was with me, and they did not like to interrupt me."

Mr. Slow was a grey-haired old man, nearer eighty than seventy, who, with the exception of a fortnight's holidays every year which he always spent at Margate, had attended those same chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields daily for the last sixty years. He was a stout, thickset man, very leisurely in all his motions, who walked slowly, talked slowly, read slowly, wrote slowly, and thought slowly; but who, nevertheless, had the reputation of doing a great deal of business, and doing it very well. He had a partner in the business almost as old as himself, named Bideawhile;

and they who knew them both used to speculate which of the two was the most leisurely. It was, however, generally felt, that, though Mr. Slow was the slowest in his speech, Mr. Bideawhile was the longest in getting anything said. Mr. Slow would often beguile his time with unnecessary remarks; but Mr. Bideawhile was so constant in beguiling his time, that men wondered how, in truth, he ever did anything at all. Of both of them it may be said that no men stood higher in their profession, and that Mr. Ball's suspicions, had they been known in the neighbourhood of Lincoln's Inn, would have been scouted as utterly baseless. And, for the comfort of my readers, let me assure them that they were utterly baseless. There might, perhaps, have been a little vanity about Mr. Slow as to the names of his aristocratic clients; but he was an honest, painstaking man, who had ever done his duty well by those who had employed him.

Is it not remarkable that the common repute which we all give to attorneys in the general is exactly opposite to that which every man gives to his own attorney in particular? Whom does anybody trust so implicitly as he trusts his own attorney? And yet is it not the case that the body of attorneys is supposed to be the most roguish body in existence?

The old man seemed now to be a little fretful,

and said something more about his sorrow in their having been sent into that room.

"We are so crowded," he said, "that we hardly know how to stir ourselves."

Miss Mackenzie said it did not signify in the least. Mr. Ball said nothing, but seated himself with his chin again resting on his umbrella.

"I was sorry to see in the papers an account of your brother's death," said Mr. Slow.

"Yes, Mr. Slow; he has gone, and left a wife and very large family."

"I hope they are provided for, Miss Mackenzie."

"No, indeed; they are not provided for at all. My brother had not been fortunate in business."

"And yet he went into it with a large capital, —with a large capital in such a business as that."

John Ball, with his chin on the umbrella, said nothing. He said nothing, but he winced as he thought whence the capital had come. And he thought, too, of those much-meaning words: "Jonathan Ball to John Ball, junior. Deed of gift."

"He has been unfortunate," said Miss Mackenzie, in an apologetic tone.

"And what will you do about your loan?" said Mr. Slow, looking over to John Ball when he asked the question, as though inquiring whether all Miss Mackenzie's affairs were to be

talked over openly in the presence of that gentleman.

"That was a gift," said Miss Mackenzie.

"A deed of gift," thought John Ball to himself. "A deed of gift!"

"Oh, indeed! Then there's an end of that, I suppose," said Mr. Slow.

"Exactly so. I have been explaining to my cousin all about it. I hope the firm will be able to pay my sister-in-law the interest of it, but that does not seem sure."

"I am afraid I cannot help you there, Miss Mackenzie."

"Of course not. I was not thinking of it. But what I've come about is this." Then she told Mr. Slow the whole of her project with reference to her fortune; how, on his death-bed, she had promised to give half of all that she had to her brother's wife and family, and how she had come there to him, with her cousin, in order that he might put her in the way of keeping her promise.

Mr. Slow sat in silence and patiently heard her to the end. She, finding herself thus encouraged to speak, expatiated on the solemnity of her promise, and declared that she could not be comfortable till she had done all that she had undertaken to perform. "And I shall have quite enough for myself afterwards, Mr. Slow, quite enough."

Mr. Slow did not say a word till she had done, and even then he seemed to delay his speech. John Ball never raised his face from his umbrella, but sat looking at the lawyer, whom he still suspected of roguery. And if the lawyer were a rogue, what then about his cousin? It must not be supposed that he suspected her; but what would come of her, if the fortune she held were, in truth, not her own?"

"I have told my cousin all about it," continued Margaret, "and I believe that he thinks I am doing right. At any rate, I would do nothing without his knowing it."

"I think she is giving her sister-in-law too much," said John Ball.

"I am only doing what I promised," urged Margaret.

"I think that the money which she lent to the firm should, at any rate, be deducted," said John Ball, speaking this with a kind of proviso to himself, that the words so spoken were intended to be taken as having any meaning only on the presumption that that document which he had seen in the other room should turn out to be wholly inoperative and inefficient at the present moment. In answer to these side-questions or corollary points as to the deduction or non-deduction of the loan, Mr. Slow answered not a word; but when there was silence between

them, he did make answer as to the original proposition.

"Miss Mackenzie," he said, "I think you had better postpone doing anything in this matter for the present."

"Why postpone it?" said she.

"Your brother's death is very recent. It happened not above a fortnight since, I think."

"And I want to have this settled at once, so that there shall be no distress. What's the good of waiting?"

"Such things want thinking of, Miss Mackenzie."

"But I have thought of it. All I want now is to have it done."

A slight smile came across the puckered grey face of the lawyer as he felt the imperative nature of the instruction given to him. The lady had come there not to be advised, but to have her work done for her out of hand. But the smile was very melancholy, and soon passed away.

"Is the widow in immediate distress?" asked Mr. Slow.

Now the fact was that Miss Mackenzie herself had been in good funds, having had ready money in her hands from the time of her brother Walter's death; and for the last year she had by no means spent her full income. She had, therefore, given her sister-in-law money, and had paid the small

debts which had come in, as such small debts will come in, directly the dead man's body was under ground. Nay, some had come in and had been paid while the man was yet dying. She explained, therefore, that her sister-in-law was not absolutely in immediate want.

"And does she keep the house?" asked the lawyer.

Then Miss Mackenzie explained that Mrs. Tom intended, if possible, to keep the house, and to take some lady to lodge with her.

"Then there cannot be any immediate hurry," urged the lawyer; "and as the sum of money in question is large, I really think the matter should be considered."

But Miss Mackenzie still pressed it. She was very anxious to make him understand,—and of course he did understand at once,—that she had no wish to hurry him in his work. All that she required of him was an assurance that he accepted her instructions, and that the thing should be done with not more than the ordinary amount of legal delay.

"You can pay her what you like out of your own income," said the lawyer.

"But that is not what I promised," said Margaret Mackenzie.

Then there was silence among them all. Mr. Ball had said very little since he had been sitting

in that room, and now it was not he who broke the silence. He was still thinking of that deed of gift, and wondering whether it had anything to do with Mr. Slow's unwillingness to undertake the commission which Margaret wished to give him. At last Mr. Slow got up from his chair, and spoke as follows;

"Mr. Ball, I hope you will excuse me; but I have a word or two to say to Miss Mackenzie, which I had rather say to her alone."

"Certainly," said Mr. Ball, rising and preparing to go.

"You will wait for me, John," said Miss Mackenzie, asking this favour of him as though she were very anxious that he should grant it.

Mr. Slow said that he might be closeted with Miss Mackenzie for some little time, perhaps for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes. John Ball looked at his watch, and then at his cousin's face, and then promised that he would wait. Mr. Slow himself took him into the outer office, and then handed him a chair; but he observed that he was not allowed to go back into the waiting-room.

There he waited for three-quarters of an hour, constantly looking at his watch, and thinking more and more about that deed of gift. Surely it must be the case that the document which he had seen had some reference to this great delay. At last he heard a door open, and a step along a

passage, and then another door was opened, and Mr. Slow reappeared with Margaret Mackenzie behind him. John Ball's eyes immediately fell on his cousin's face, and he could see that it was very pale. The lawyer's wore that smile which men put on when they wish to cover the disagreeable seriousness of the moment.

"Good morning, Miss Mackenzie," said he, pressing his client's hand.

"Good morning, sir," said she.

The lawyer and Mr. Ball then touched each other's hands, and the former followed his cousin down the steps out into the square.

CHAPTER III.

TRIBULATION.

When they were once more out in the square, side by side, Miss Mackenzie took hold of her cousin's arm, and walked on for a few steps in silence, in the direction of Great Queen Street,—that is to say, away from the city, towards which she knew her cousin would go in pursuit of his own business. And indeed the hour was now close at hand in which he should be sitting as a director at the Shadrach Fire Assurance Office. If not at the Shadrach by two, or, with all possible allowance for the short-coming of a generally punctual director, by a quarter past two, he would be too late for his guinea; and now, as he looked at his watch, it wanted only ten minutes to two. He was very particular about these guineas, and the chambers of the Shadrach were away in Old Broad Street. Nevertheless he walked on with her.

"John," she said, when they had walked half

the length of that side of the square, "I have heard dreadful news."

Then that deed of gift was, after all, a fact; and Mr. Slow, instead of being a rogue, must be the honestest old lawyer in London! He must have been at work in discovering the wrong that had been done, and was now about to reveal it to the world. Some such idea as this had glimmered across Mr. Ball's mind as he had sat in Mr. Slow's outer office, with his chin still resting on his umbrella.

But though some such idea as this did cross his mind, his thought on the instant was of his cousin.

"What dreadful news, Margaret?"

"It is about my money."

"Stop a moment, Margaret. Are you sure that you ought to tell it to me?"

"If I don't, to whom shall I tell it? And how can I bear it without telling it to some one?"

"Did Mr. Slow bid you speak of it to me?"

"No; he bade me think much of it before I did so, as you are concerned. And he said that you might perhaps be disappointed."

Then they walked on again in silence. John Ball found his position to be very difficult, and hardly knew how to speak to her, or how to carry himself. If it was to be that this money was to come back to him; if it was his now in spite of

all that had come and gone; if the wrong done was to be righted, and the property wrested from him was to be restored,—restored to him who wanted it so sorely,—how could he not triumph in such an act of tardy restitution? He remembered all the particulars at this moment. Twelve thousand pounds of his uncle Jonathan's money had gone to Walter Mackenzie. The sum once intended for him had been much more than that, —more he believed than double that; but if twelve thousand pounds was now restored to him, how different would it make the whole tenor of his life! Mr. Slow said that he might be disappointed; but then Mr. Slow was not his lawyer. Did he not owe it to his family immediately to go to his own attorney? Now he thought no more of his guinea at the Shadrach, but walked on by his cousin's side with his mind intently fixed on his uncle's money. She was still leaning on his arm.

"Tell me, John, what shall I do?" said she, looking up into his face.

Would it not be better for them, better for the interests of them both, that they should be separated? Was it probable, or possible, that with interests so adverse, they should give each other good advice? Did it not behove him to explain to her that till this should be settled between them, they must necessarily regard each other as

enemies? For a moment or two he wished himself away from her, and was calculating how he might escape. But then, when he looked down at her, and saw the softness of her eye, and felt the confidence implied in the weight of her hand upon his arm, his hard heart was softened, and he relented.

"It is difficult to tell you what you should do," he said. "At present nothing seems to be known. He has said nothing for certain."

"But I could understand him," she said, in reply; "I could see by his face, and I knew by the tone of his voice, that he was almost certain. I know that he is sure of it. John, I shall be a beggar, an absolute beggar. I shall have nothing; and those poor children will be beggars, and their mother. I feel as though I did not know where I am, or what I am doing."

Then an idea came into his head. If this money was not hers, it was his. If it was not his, then it was hers. Would it not be well that they should solve all the difficulty by agreeing then and there to be man and wife? It was true that since his Rachel's death he had seen no woman whom he so much coveted to have in his home as this one who now leaned on his arm. But, as he thought of it, there seemed to be a romance about such a step which would not befit him. What would his mother and father say to

him if, after all his troubles, he was at last to marry a woman without a farthing? And then, too, would she consent to give up all further consideration for her brother's family? Would she agree to abandon her idea of assisting them, if ultimately it should turn out that the property was hers? No; there was certainly a looseness about such a plan which did not befit him; and, moreover, were he to attempt it, he would probably not succeed.

But something must be done, now at this moment. The guinea at the Shadrach was gone for ever, and therefore he could devote himself for the day to his cousin.

"Are you to hear again from Mr. Slow?" he said.

"I am to go to him this day week."

"And then it will be decided?"

"John, it is decided now; I am sure of it. I feel that it is all gone. A careful man like that would never have spoken as he did, unless he was sure. It will be all yours, John."

"So would have been that which your brother had," said he.

"I suppose so. It is dreadful to think of; very dreadful. I can only promise that I will spend nothing till it is decided. John, I wish you would take from me what I have, lest it should go." And she absolutely had her hand upon her purse in her pocket.

"No," said he slowly, "no; you need think of nothing of that sort."

"But what am I to do? Where am I to go while this week passes by?"

"You will stay where you are, of course."

"Oh John! if you could understand! How am I to look my aunt in the face? Don't you know that she would not wish to have me there at all if I was a poor creature without anything." The poor creature did not know herself how terribly heavy was the accusation she was bringing against her aunt. "And what will she say when she knows that the money I have spent has never really been my own?"

Then he counselled her to say nothing about it to her aunt till after her next visit to Mr. Slow's, and made her understand that he, himself, would not mention the subject at the Cedars till the week was passed. He should go, he said, to his own lawyer, and tell him the whole story as far as he knew it. It was not that he in the least doubted Mr. Slow's honesty or judgment, but it would be better that the two should act together. Then when the week was over, he and Margaret would once more go to Lincoln's Inn Fields.

"What a week I shall have!" said she.

"It will be a nervous time for us both," he answered.

"And what must I do after that?" This

question she asked, not in the least as desirous of obtaining from him any assurance of assistance, but in the agony of her spirit, and in sheer dismay as to her prospects.

"We must hope for the best," he said. "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." He had often thought of the way in which he had been shorn, but he did not, at this moment, remember that the shearing had never been so tempered as to be acceptable to his own feelings.

"And in God only can I trust," she answered. As she said this, her mind went away to Littlebath, and the Stumfoldians, and Mr. Maguire. Was there not great mercy in the fact, that this ruin had not found her married to that unfortunate clergyman? And what would they all say at Littlebath when they heard the story? How would Mrs. Stumfold exult over the downfall of the woman who had rebelled against her? how would the nose of the coachmaker's wife rise in the air? and how would Mr. Maguire rejoice that this great calamity had not fallen upon him? Margaret Mackenzie's heart and spirit had been sullied by no mean feeling with reference to her own wealth. It had never puffed her up with exaltation. But she calculated on the meanness of others, as though it was a matter of course, not, indeed, knowing that it was meanness, or blaming them in any way for that which she

attributed to them. Four gentlemen had wished to marry her during the past year. It never occurred to her now, that any one of these four would on that account hold out a hand to help her. In losing her money she would have lost all that was desirable in their eyes, and this seemed to her to be natural.

They were still walking round Lincoln's Inn Fields. "John," she exclaimed suddenly, "I must go to them in Gower Street."

"What, now, to-day?"

"Yes, now, immediately. You need not mind me; I can get back to Twickenham by myself. I know the trains."

"If I were you, Margaret, I would not go till all this is decided."

"It is decided, John; I know it is. And how can I leave them in such a condition, spending money which they will never get? They must know it some time, and the sooner the better. Mr. Rubb must know it too. He must understand that he is more than ever bound to provide them with an income out of the business."

"I would not do it to-day if I were you."

"But I must, John; this very day. If I am not home by dinner, tell them that I had to go to Gower Street. I shall, at any rate, be there in the evening. Do not you mind coming back with me."

They were then at the gate leading into the New Square, and she turned abruptly round, and hurried away from him up into Holborn, passing very near to Mr. Slow's chambers. John Ball did not attempt to follow her, but stood there awhile looking after her. He felt, in his heart, and knew by his judgment, that she was a good woman, true, unselfish, full of love, clever too in her way, quick in apprehension, and endowed with an admirable courage. He had heard her spoken of at the Cedars as a poor creature who had money. Nay, he himself had taken a part in so speaking of her. Now she had no money, but he knew well that she was a creature the very reverse of poor. What should he do for her? In what way should he himself behave towards her? In the early days of his youth, before the cares of the world had made him hard, he had married his Rachel without a penny, and his father had laughed at him, and his mother had grieved over him. Tough and hard, and care-worn as he was now, defiled by the price of stocks, and saturated with the poison of the money market, then there had been in him a touch of romance and a dash of poetry, and he had been happy with his Rachel. Should he try it again now? The woman would surely love him when she found that he came to her in her poverty as he had before come to her in her

wealth. He watched her till she passed out of his sight along the wall leading to Holborn, and then he made his way to the City through Lincoln's Inn and Chancery Lane.

Margaret walked straight into Holborn, and over it towards Red Lion Square. She crossed the line of the omnibuses, feeling that now she must spend no penny which she could save. She was tired, for she had already walked much that morning, and the day was close and hot; but nevertheless she went on quickly, through Bloomsbury Square and Russell Square, to Gower Street. As she got near to the door her heart almost failed her; but she went up to it and knocked boldly. The thing should be done, let the pain of doing it be what it might.

"Laws, Miss Margaret! is that you?" said the maid. "Yes, missus is at home. She'll see you, of course, but she's hard at work on the furniture."

Then she went directly up into the drawing-room, and there she found her sister-in-law, with her dress tucked up to her elbows, with a cloth in her hand, rubbing the chairs.

"What, Margaret! Whoever expected to see you? If we are to let the rooms, it's as well to have the things tidy, isn't it? Besides, a person bears it all the better when there's anything to do."

Then Mary Jane, the eldest daughter, came in from the bed-room behind the drawing-room, similarly armed for work.

Margaret sat down wearily upon the sofa, having muttered some word in answer to Mrs. Tom's apology for having been found at work so soon after her husband's death.

"Sarah," she said, "I have come to you to-day because I had something to say to you about business."

"Oh, to be sure! I never thought for a moment you had come for pleasure, or out of civility, as it might be. Of course I didn't expect that when I saw you."

"Sarah, will you come up-stairs with me into your own room?"

"Up-stairs, Margaret? Oh yes, if you please. We shall be down directly, my dear, and I dare say Margaret will stay to tea. We tea early, because, since you went, we have dined at one."

Then Mrs. Tom led the way up to the room in which Margaret had watched by her dying brother's bed-side.

"I'm come in here," said Mrs. Tom, again apologizing, "because the children had to come out of the room behind the drawing-room. Miss Colza is staying with us, and she and Mary Jane have your room."

Margaret did not care much for all this; but

the solemnity of the chamber in which, when she last saw it, her brother's body was lying, added something to her sadness at the moment.

"Sarah," she said, endeavouring to warn her sister-in-law by the tone of her voice that her news was bad news, "I have just come from Mr. Slow."

"He's the lawyer, isn't he?"

"Yes, he's the lawyer. You know what I promised my brother. I went to him to make arrangements for doing it, and when there I heard,—oh Sarah, such dreadful news!"

"He says you're not to do it, I suppose!" And in the woman's voice and eyes there were signs of anger, not against Mr. Slow alone, but also against Miss Mackenzie. "I knew how it would be. But, Margaret, Mr. Slow has got nothing to do with it. A promise is a promise; and a promise made to a dying man! Oh, Margaret!"

"If I had it to give I would give it as surely as I am standing here. When I told my brother it should be so, he believed me at once."

"Of course he believed you."

"But, Sarah, they tell me now that I have nothing to give."

"Who tells you so?"

"The lawyer. I cannot explain it all to you; indeed, I do not as yet understand it myself; but

I have learned this morning that the property which Walter left me was not his to leave. It had been given away before Mr. Jonathan Ball died."

"It's a lie!" said the injured woman,—the woman who was the least injured, but who, with her children, had perhaps the best excuse for being ill able to bear the injury. "It must be a lie. It's more than twenty years ago. I don't believe and won't believe that it can be so. John Ball must have something to do with this."

"The property will go to him, but he has had nothing to do with it. Mr. Slow found it out."

"It can't be so, not after twenty years. Whatever they may have done from Walter, they can't take it away from you; not if you've spirit enough to stand up for your rights. If you let them take it in that way, I can't tell you what I shall think of you."

"It is my own lawyer that says so."

"Yes, Mr. Slow; the biggest rogue of them all. I always knew that of him, always. Oh, Margaret, think of the children! What are we to do? What are we to do?" And, sitting down on the bed-side, she put her dirty apron up to her eyes.

"I have been thinking of them ever since I heard it," said Margaret.

"But what good will thinking do? You must do something. Oh! Margaret, after all that you

said to him when he lay there dying!" and the woman, with some approach to true pathos, put her hand on the spot where her husband's head had rested. "Don't let his children come to beggary because men like that choose to rob the widow and the orphan."

"Every one has a right to what is his own," said Margaret. "Even though widows should be beggars, and orphans should want."

"That's very well of you, Margaret. It's very well for you to say that, who have friends like the Balls to stand by you. And, perhaps, if you will let him have it all without saying anything, he will stand by you firmer than ever. But who is there to stand by me and my children? It can't be that after twenty years your fortune should belong to anyone else. Why should it have gone on for more than twenty years, and nobody have found it out? I don't believe it can come so, Margaret, unless you choose to let them do it. I don't believe a word of it."

There was nothing more to be said upon that subject at present. Mrs. Tom did indeed say a great deal more about it, sometimes threatening Margaret and sometimes imploring her; but Miss Mackenzie herself would not allow herself to speak of the thing otherwise than as an ascertained fact. Had the other woman been more reasonable or less passionate in her lamentations, Miss

Mackenzie might have trusted herself to tell her that there was yet a doubt. But she herself felt that the doubt was so small, and that, in Mrs. Tom's mind, it would be so magnified into nearly a certainty on the other side, that she thought it most discreet not to refer to the exact amount of information which Mr. Slow had given to her.

"It will be best for us to think, Sarah," she said, trying to turn the other's mind away from the coveted income which she would never possess,—"to think what you and the children had better do."

"Oh, dear; oh, dear; oh, dear!"

"It is very bad; but there is always something to be done. We must lose no time in letting Mr. Rubb know the truth. When he hears how it is, he will understand that something must be done for you out of the firm."

"He won't do anything. He's down-stairs now, flirting with that girl in the drawing-room, instead of being at his business."

"If he's down-stairs, I will see him."

As Mrs. Mackenzie made no objection to this, Margaret went down-stairs, and when she came near the passage at the bottom, she heard the voices of people talking merrily in the parlour. As her hand was on the lock of the door, words from Miss Colza became very audible. "Now, Mr.

Rubb, be quiet." So she knocked at the door, and having been invited by Mr. Rubb to come in, she opened it.

It may be presumed that the flirting had not gone to any perilous extent, as there were three or four children present. Nevertheless Miss Colza and Mr. Rubb were somewhat disconcerted, and expressed their surprise at seeing Miss Mackenzie.

"We all thought you were staying with the baronet's lady," said Miss Colza.

Miss Mackenzie explained that she was staying at Twickenham, but that she had come up to pay a visit to her sister-in-law. "And I've a word or two I want to say to you, Mr. Rubb, if you'll allow me."

"I suppose, then, I'd better make myself scarce," said Miss Colza.

As she was not asked to stay, she did make herself scarce, taking the children with her up among the tables and chairs in the drawing-room. There she found Mary Jane, but she did not find Mrs. Mackenzie, who had thrown herself on the bed in her agony up-stairs.

Then Miss Mackenzie told her wretched story to Mr. Rubb,—telling it for the third time. He was awe-struck as he listened, but did not once attempt to deny the facts as had been done by Mrs. Mackenzie.

"And is it sure?" he asked, when her story was over.

"I don't suppose it is quite sure yet. Indeed, Mr. Slow said it was not quite sure. But I have not allowed myself to doubt it, and I do not doubt it."

"If he himself had not felt himself sure, he would not have told you."

"Just so, Mr. Rubb. That is what I think; and therefore I have given my sister-in-law no hint that there is a chance left. I think you had better not do so either."

"Perhaps not," said he. He spoke in a low voice, almost whispering, as though he were half scared by the tidings he had heard.

"It is very dreadful," she said; "very dreadful for Sarah and the children."

"And for you too, Miss Mackenzie."

"But about them, Mr. Rubb. What can you do for them out of the business?"

He looked very blank, and made no immediate answer.

"I know you will feel for their position," she said. "You do; do you not?"

"Indeed I do, Miss Mackenzie."

"And you will do what you can. You can at any rate ensure them the interest of the money, —of the money you know that came from me."

Still Mr. Rubb sat in silence, and she thought

that he must be stony-hearted. Surely he might undertake to do that, knowing, as he so well knew, the way in which the money had been obtained, and knowing also that he had already said that so much should be forthcoming out of the firm to make up a general income for the family of his late partner.

"Surely there will be no doubt about that, Mr. Rubb."

"The Balls will claim the debt," said he hoarsely; and then, in answer to her inquiries, he explained that the sum she had lent had not, in truth, been hers to lend. It had formed part of the money that John Ball could claim, and Mr. Slow held in his hands an acknowledgment of the debt from Rubb and Mackenzie. Of course, Mr. Ball would claim that the interest should be paid to him; and he would claim the principal too, if, on inquiry, he should find that the firm would be able to raise it. "I don't know that he wouldn't be able to come upon the firm for the money your brother put into the business," said he gloomily. "But I don't think he'll be such a fool as that. He'd get nothing by it."

"Then may God help them!" said Miss Mackenzie.

"And what will you do?" he asked.

She shook her head, but made him no answer. As for herself she had not begun to form a plan.

Her own condition did not seem to her to be nearly so dreadful as that of all these young children.

"I wish I knew how to help you," said Samuel Rubb.

"There are some positions, Mr. Rubb, in which no one but God can help one. But, perhaps,—perhaps you may still do something for the children."

"I will try, Miss Mackenzie."

"Thank you, and may God bless you; and He will bless you if you do try. 'Who giveth a drop of water to one of them in my name, giveth it also to me.' You will think of that, will you not?"

"I will think of you, and do the best that I can."

"I had hoped to have made them so comfortable! But God's will be done; God's will be done. I think I had better go now, Mr. Rubb. There will be no use in my going to her up-stairs again. Tell her from me, with my love, that she shall hear from me when I have seen the lawyer. I will try to come to her, but perhaps I may not be able. Good-bye, Mr. Rubb."

"Good-bye, Miss Mackenzie. I hope we shall see each other sometimes."

"Perhaps so. Do what you can to support her. She will want all that her friends can do for her."

So saying she went out of the room, and let herself out of the front door into the street, and began her walk back to the Waterloo Station.

She had not broken bread in her sister-in-law's house, and it was now nearly six o'clock. She had taken nothing since she had breakfasted at Twickenham, and the affairs of the day had been such as to give her but little time to think of such wants. But now as she made her weary way through the streets she became sick with hunger, and went into a baker's shop for a bun. As she ate it she felt that it was almost wrong in her to buy even that. At the present moment nothing that she possessed seemed to her to be, by right, her own. Every shilling in her purse was the property of John Ball, if Mr. Slow's statement were true. Then, when the bun was finished, as she went down by Bloomsbury Church and the region of St. Giles's back to the Strand, she did begin to think of her own position. What should she do, and how should she commence to do it? She had declared to herself but lately that the work for which she was fittest was that of nursing the sick. Was it not possible that she might earn her bread in this way? Could she not find such employment in some quarter where her labour would be worth the food she must eat and the raiment she would require? There was a hospital somewhere in London with which she

thought she had heard that John Ball was connected. Might not he obtain for her a situation such as that?

It was past eight when she reached the Cedars, and then she was very tired,—very tired and nearly sick also with want. She went first of all up to her room, and then crept down into the drawing-room, knowing that she should find them at tea. When she entered there was a large party round the table, consisting of the girls and children and Lady Ball. John Ball, who never took tea, was sitting in his accustomed place near the lamp, and the old baronet was half asleep in his arm-chair.

"If you were going to dine in Gower Street, Margaret, why didn't you say so?" said Lady Ball.

In answer to this, Margaret burst out into tears. It was not the unkindness of her aunt's voice that upset her so much as her own weakness, and the terrible struggle of the long day.

"What on earth is the matter?" said Sir John.

One of the girls brought her a cup of tea, but she felt herself to be too weak to take it in her hand, and made a sign that it should be put on the table. She was not aware that she had ever fainted, but a fear came upon her that she might do so now. She rallied herself and struggled, striving to collect her strength.

"Do you know what is the matter with her, John?" said Lady Ball.

Then John Ball asked her if she had had dinner, and when she did not answer him he saw how it was.

"Mother," he said, "she has had no food all day; I will get it for her."

"If she wants anything, the servants can bring it to her, John," said the mother.

But he would not trust the servants in this matter, but went out himself and fetched her meat and wine, and pressed her to take it, and sat himself beside her, and spoke kind words into her ear, and at last, in some sort, she was comforted.

CHAPTER IV.

SHOWING HOW TWO OF MISS MACKENZIE'S LOVERS BEHAVED.

Mr. Ball, on his return home to the Cedars, had given no definite answer to his mother's inquiries as to the day's work in London, and had found it difficult to make any reply to her that would for the moment suffice. She was not a woman easily satisfied with evasive answers; but, nevertheless, he told her nothing of what had occurred, and left her simply in a bad humour. This conversation had taken place before dinner, but after dinner she asked him another question.

"John, you might as well tell me this; are you engaged to Margaret Mackenzie?"

"No, I am not," said her son, angrily.

After that his mother's humour had become worse than before, and in that state her niece had found her when she returned home in the evening, and had suffered in consequence.

On the next morning Miss Mackenzie sent down

word to say that she was not well, and would not come down to breakfast. It so happened that John Ball was going into town on this day also, the Abednego Life Office holding its board day immediately after that of the Shadrach Fire Office, and therefore he was not able to see her before she encountered his mother. Lady Ball went up to her in her bedroom immediately after breakfast, and there remained with her for some time. Her aunt at first was tender with her, giving her tea, and only asking her gentle little questions at intervals; but as the old lady became impatient at learning nothing, she began a system of cross-questions, and at last grew to be angry and disagreeable. Her son had distinctly told her that he was not engaged to his cousin, and had in fact told her nothing else distinctly; but she, when she had seen how careful he had been in supplying Margaret's wants himself, with what anxious solicitude he had pressed wine on her; how he had sat by her saying soft words to her;—Lady Ball, when she remembered this, could not but think that her son had deceived her. And if so, why had he wished to deceive her? Could it be that he had allowed her to give away half her money, and had promised to marry her with the other half? There were moments in which her dear son John could be very foolish, in spite of that life-long devotion to the price of stocks,

for which he was conspicuous. She still remembered, as though it were but the other day, how he had persisted in marrying Rachel, though Rachel brought nothing with her but a sweet face, a light figure, a happy temper, and the clothes on her back. To all mothers their sons are ever young, and to old Lady Ball John Ball was still young, and still, possibly, capable of some such folly as that of which she was thinking. If it were not so, if there were not something of that kind in the wind, why should he,—why should she,—be so hard and uncommunicative in all their answers. There lay her niece, however. sick with the headache, and therefore weak, and very much in Lady Ball's power. The evil to be done was great, and the necessity for preventing it might be immediate. And Lady Ball was a lady who did not like to be kept in the dark in reference to anything concerning her family. Having gone down-stairs, therefore, for an hour or so to look after her servants, or, as she had said, to allow Margaret to have a little sleep, she returned again to the charge, and sitting close to Margaret's pillow, did her best to find out the truth.

If she could only have known the whole truth; how her son's thoughts were running throughout the day, even as he sat at the Abednego board, not on Margaret with half her fortune, but on

Margaret with none; how he was recalling the sweetness of her face as she looked up to him in the square, and took him by his coat, and her tears as she spoke of the orphan children, and the grace of her figure as she had walked away from him, and the persistency of her courage in doing what she thought to be right! how he was struggling within himself with an endeavour, a vain endeavour, at a resolution that such a marriage as that must be out of the question! Had Lady Ball known all that, I think she would have flown to the offices of the Abednego after her son, and never have left him till she had conquered his heart and trampled his folly under her feet.

But she did not conquer Margaret Mackenzie. The poor creature lying there, racked, in truth, with pain and sorrow, altogether incapable of any escape from her aunt's gripe, would not say a word that might tend to ease Lady Ball's mind. If she had told all that she knew, all that she surmised, how would her aunt have rejoined? That the money should come without the wife would indeed have been a triumph! And Margaret in telling all would have had nothing to tell of those terribly foolish thoughts which were then at work in the City. To her such a state of things as that at which I have hinted would have seemed quite as improbable, quite as unaccountable, as it

would have done to her aunt. But she did not tell all, nor in truth did she tell anything.

"And John was with you at the lawyer's," said Lady Ball, attempting her cross-examination for the third time.

"Yes; he was with me there."

"And what did he say when you asked Mr. Slow to make such a settlement as that?"

"He didn't say anything, aunt. The whole thing was put off."

"I know it was put off; of course it was put off. I didn't suppose any respectable lawyer in London would have dreamed of doing such a thing. But what I want to know is, how it was put off. What did Mr. Slow say?"

"I am to see him again next week."

"But not to get him to do anything of that kind?"

"I can't tell, aunt, what he is to do then."

"But what did he say when you made such a proposition as that? Did he not tell you that it was quite out of the question?"

"I don't think he said that, aunt."

"Then what did he say? Margaret, I never saw such a person as you are. Why should you be so mysterious? There can't be anything you don't want me to know, seeing how very much I am concerned; and I do think you ought to tell me all that occurred, knowing, as you do,

that I have done my very best to be kind to you."

"Indeed there isn't anything I can tell;—not yet."

Then Lady Ball remained silent at the bed-head for the space, perhaps, of ten minutes, meditating over it all. If her son was, in truth, engaged to this woman, at any rate she would find that out. If she asked a point-blank question on that subject, Margaret would not be able to leave it unanswered, and would hardly be able to give a directly false answer.

"My dear," she said, "I think you will not refuse to tell me plainly whether there is anything between you and John. As his mother, I have a right to know?"

"How anything between us?" said Margaret, raising herself on her elbow.

"Are you engaged to marry him?"

"Oh, dear! no."

"And there is nothing of that sort going on?"

"Nothing at all."

"You are determined still to refuse him?"

"It is quite out of the question, aunt. He does not wish it at all. You may be sure that he has quite changed his mind about that."

"But he won't have changed his mind if you have given up your plan about your sister-in-law."

"He has changed it altogether, aunt. You

needn't think anything more about that. He thinks no more about it."

Nevertheless he was thinking about it this very moment, as he voted for accepting a doubtful life at the Abednego, which was urged on the board by a director, who, I hope, had no intimate personal relations with the owner of the doubtful life in question.

Lady Ball did not know what to make of it. For many years past she had not seen her son carry himself so much like a lover as he had done when he sat himself beside his cousin pressing her to drink her glass of sherry. Why was he, then, so anxious for her comfort? And why, before that, had he been so studiously reticent as to her affairs?

"I can't make anything out of you," said Lady Ball, getting up from her chair with angry alacrity; "and I must say that I think it very ungrateful of you, seeing all that I have done for you."

So saying, she left the room.

What, oh, what would she think when she should come to know the truth! Margaret told herself as she lay there, holding her head between her hands, that she was even now occupying that room and enjoying the questionable comfort of that bed under false pretences. When it was known that she was absolutely a pauper, would she then be made welcome to her

uncle's house? She was now remaining there without divulging her circumstances, under the advice and by the authority of her cousin; and she had resolved to be guided by him in all things as long as he would be at the trouble to guide her. On whom else could she depend? But, nevertheless, her position was very grievous to her, and the more so now that her aunt had twitted her with ingratitude. When the servant came to her, she felt that she had no right to the girl's services; and when a message was brought to her from Lady Ball, asking whether she would be taken out in the carriage, she acknowledged to herself that such courtesy to her was altogether out of place.

On that evening her cousin said nothing to her, and on the next day he went again up to town.

"What, four days running, John!" said Lady Ball, at breakfast.

"I have particular business to-day, mother," said he.

On that evening, when he came back, he found a moment to take Margaret by the hand and tell her that his own lawyer also was to meet them at Mr. Slow's chambers on the day named. He took her thus, and held her hand closely in his while he was speaking, but he said nothing to her more tender than the nature of such a communication required.

"You and John are terribly mysterious," said Lady Ball to her, a minute or two afterwards. "If there is anything I do hate, it is mystery in families. We never had any with us till you came."

On the next day a letter reached her which had been re-directed from Gower Street. It was from Mr. Maguire; and she took it up into her own room to read it and answer it. The letter and the reply were as follows:

"Littlebath, Oct., 186—.

"DEAREST MARGARET,—"I hope the circumstances of the case will, in your opinion, justify me in writing to you again, though I am sorry to intrude upon you at a time when your heart must yet be sore with grief for the loss of your lamented brother. Were we now all in all to each other, as I hope we may still be before long, it would be my sweet privilege to wipe your eyes, and comfort you in your sorrow, and bid you remember that it is the Lord who giveth and the Lord who taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. I do not doubt that you have spoken to yourself daily in those words, nay, almost hourly, since your brother was taken from you. I had not the privilege of knowing him, but if he was in any way like his sister, he would have been a friend whom I should have delighted to press to my breast and carry in my heart of hearts.

"But now, dearest Margaret, will you allow me to intrude upon you with another theme? Of course you well know the subject upon which, at present, I am thinking more than on any other. May I be permitted to hope that that subject sometimes presents itself to you in a light that is not altogether disagreeable. When you left Littlebath so suddenly, carried away on a mission of love and kindness, you left me, as you will doubtless remember, in a state of some suspense. You had kindly consented to acknowledge that I was not altogether indifferent to you."

"That's not true," said Margaret to herself, almost out loud; "I never told him anything of the kind."

"And it was arranged that on that very day we were to have had a meeting, to which,—shall I confess it?—I looked forward as the happiest moment of my life. I can hardly tell you what my feelings were when I found that you were going, and that I could only just say to you, farewell. If I could only have been with you when that letter came I think I could have softened your sorrow, and perhaps then, in your gentleness, you might have said a word which would have left me nothing to wish for in this world. But it has been otherwise ordered, and, Margaret, I do not complain.

"But what makes me write now is the great

necessity that I should know exactly how I stand. You said something in your last dear letter which gave me to understand that you wished to do something for your brother's family. Promises made by the bed-sides of the dying are always dangerous, and in the cases of Roman Catholics have been found to be replete with ruin."

Mr. Maguire, no doubt, forgot that in such cases the promises are made by, and not to, the dying person.

"Nevertheless, I am very far from saying that they should not be kept in a modified form, and you need not think for a moment that I, if I may be allowed to have an interest in the matter, would wish to hinder you from doing whatever may be becoming. I think I may promise you that you will find no mercenary spirit in me, although, of course, I am bound, looking forward to the tender tie which will, I hope, connect us, to regard your interests above all other worldly affairs. If I may then say a word of advice, it is to recommend that nothing permanent be done till we can act together in this matter. Do not, however, suppose that anything you can do, or have done, can alter the nature of my regard.

"But now, dearest Margaret, will you not allow me to press for an immediate answer to my appeal? I will tell you exactly how I am circumstanced, and then you will see how strong is my

reason that there should be no delay. Very many people here, I may say all the élite of the evangelical circles, including Mrs. Perch,—Mrs. Perch was the coachmaker's wife, who had always been so true to Mrs. Stumfold,—desire that I should establish a church here, on my own bottom, quite independent of Mr. Stumfold. The Stumfolds would then soon have to leave Littlebath, there is no doubt of that, and she has already made herself so unendurable, and her father and she together are so distressing, that the best of their society has fallen away from them. Her treatment to you was such that I could never endure her afterwards. Now the opening for a clergyman with pure Gospel doctrines would be the best thing that has turned up for a long time. The church would be worth over six hundred a-year, besides the interest of the money which would have to be laid out. I could have all this commenced at once, and secure the incumbency, if I could myself head the subscription list with two thousand pounds. It should not be less than that. You will understand that the money would not be given, though, no doubt, a great many persons would, in this way, be induced to give theirs. But the pew rents would go in the first instance to provide interest for the money not given, but lent;—as would of course be the case with your money, if you would advance it.

"I should not think of such a plan as this if I did not feel that it was the best thing for your interests; that is, if, as I fondly hope, I am ever to call you mine. Of course, in that case, it is only common prudence on my part to do all I can to insure for myself such a professional income, for your sake. For, dearest Margaret, my brightest earthly hope is to see you with everything comfortable around you. If that could be arranged, it would be quite within our means to keep some sort of carriage."

Here would be a fine opportunity for rivalling Mrs. Stumfold! That was the temptation with which he hoped to allure her.

"But the thing must be done quite immediately, therefore let me pray you not to postpone my hopes with unnecessary delay. I know it seems unromantic to urge a lady with any pecuniary considerations, but I think, that under the circumstances, as I have explained them, you will forgive me.

"Believe me to be, dearest Margaret,
"Yours, with truest,
"Most devoted affection,
"JEREH. MAGUIRE."

One man had wanted her money to buy a house on a mortgage, and another now asked her for it to build a church, giving her, or promising

to give her, the security of the pew rents! Which of the two was the worst? They were both her lovers, and she thought that he was the worst who first made his love and then tried to get her money. These were the ideas which at once occurred to her upon her reading Mr. Maguire's letter. She had quite wit enough to see through the whole project; how outsiders were to be induced to give their money, thinking that all was to be given; whereas those inside the temple,—those who knew all about it,—were simply to make for themselves a good speculation. Her cousin John's constant solicitude for money was bad; but, after all, it was not so bad as this. She told herself at once that the letter was one which would of itself have ended everything between her and Mr. Maguire, even had nothing occurred to put an absolute and imperative stop to the affair. Mr. Maguire pressed for an early answer, and before she left the room she sat down and wrote it.

"The Cedars, Twickenham,
"October, 186—.

"DEAR SIR"—Before she wrote the words, "Dear Sir," she had to think much of them, not having had as yet much experience in writing letters to gentlemen; but she concluded at last that if she simply wrote 'Sir,' he would take it as an insult, and that if she wrote "My dear Mr.

Maguire," it would, under the circumstances, be too affectionate.

"DEAR SIR,—I have got your letter to-day, and I hasten to answer it at once. All that to which you allude between us must be considered as being altogether over, and I am very sorry that you should have had so much trouble. My circumstances are altogether changed. I cannot explain how, as it would make my letter very long; but you may be assured that such is the case, and to so great an extent that the engagement you speak of would not at all suit you at present. Pray take this as being quite true, and believe me to be

"Your very humble servant,

"MARGARET MACKENZIE."

I feel that the letter was somewhat curt and dry as an answer to an effusion so full of affection as that which the gentleman had written; and the fair reader, when she remembers that Miss Mackenzie had given the gentleman considerable encouragement, will probably think that she should have expressed something like regret at so sudden a termination to so tender a friendship. But she, in truth, regarded the offer as having been made to her money solely, and as in fact no longer existing as an offer, now that her money itself was no longer in existence. She was angry with Mr. Maguire for the words he had written

about her brother's affairs; for his wish to limit her kindness to her nephews and nieces, and also for his greediness in being desirous of getting her money at once; but as to the main question, she thought herself bound to answer him plainly, as she would have answered a man who came to buy from her a house, which house was no longer in her possession.

Mr. Maguire, when he received her letter, did not believe a word of it. He did not in the least believe that she had actually lost everything that had once belonged to her, or that he, if he married her now, would obtain less than he would have done had he married her before her brother's death. But he thought that her brother's family and friends had got hold of her in London; that Mr. Rubb might very probably have done it; and that they were striving to obtain command of her money, and were influencing her to desert him. He thinking so, and being a man of good courage, took a resolution to follow his game, and to see whether even yet he might not obtain the good things which had made his eye glisten and his mouth water. He knew that there was very much against him in the race that he was desirous of running, and that an heiress with,—he did not know how much a-year, but it had been rumoured among the Stumfoldians that it was over a thousand,—might not again fall in his way.

There were very many things against him, of which he was quite conscious. He had not a shilling of his own, and was in receipt of no professional income. He was not altogether a young man. There was in his personal appearance a defect which many ladies might find it difficult to overcome; and then that little story about his debts, which Miss Todd had picked up, was not only true, but was some degrees under the truth. No doubt, he had a great wish that his wife should be comfortable; but he also, for himself, had long been pining after those eligible comforts, which, when they appertain to clergymen, the world, with so much malice, persists in calling the flesh-pots of Egypt. Thinking of all this, of the position he had already gained in spite of his personal disadvantages, and of the great chance there was that his Margaret might yet be rescued from the Philistines, he resolved upon a journey to London.

In the mean time Miss Mackenzie's other lover had not been idle, and he also was resolved by no means to give up the battle.

It cannot be said that Mr. Rubb was not mercenary in his views, but with his desire for the lady's money was mingled much that was courageous, and something also that was generous. The whole truth had been told to him as plainly as it had been told to Mr. Ball, and nevertheless

he determined to persevere. He went to work diligently on that very afternoon, deserting the smiles of Miss Colza, and made such inquiries into the law of the matter as were possible to him; and they resulted, as far as Miss Mackenzie was concerned, in his appearing late one afternoon at the front door of Sir John Ball's house. On the day following this Miss Mackenzie was to keep her appointment with Mr. Slow, and her cousin was now up in London among the lawyers.

Miss Mackenzie was sitting with her aunt when Mr. Rubb called. They were both in the drawing-room; and Lady Ball, who had as yet succeeded in learning nothing, and who was more than ever convinced that there was much to learn, was not making herself pleasant to her companion. Throughout the whole week she had been very unpleasant. She did not quite understand why Margaret's sojourn at the Cedars had been and was to be so much prolonged. Margaret, feeling herself compelled to say something on the subject, had with some hesitation told her aunt that she was staying till she had seen her lawyer again, because her cousin wished her to stay.

In answer to this, Lady Ball had of course told her that she was welcome. Her ladyship had then cross-questioned her son on that subject

also, but he had simply said that as there was law business to be done, Margaret might as well stay at Twickenham till it was completed.

"But, my dear," Lady Ball had said, "her law business might go on for ever, for what you know."

"Mother," said the son, sternly, "I wish her to stay here at present, and I suppose you will not refuse to permit her to do so."

After this, Lady Ball could go no further.

On the day on which Mr. Rubb was announced in the drawing-room, the aunt and niece were sitting together. "Mr. Rubb,—to see Miss Mackenzie," said the old servant, as he opened the door.

Miss Mackenzie got up, blushing to her forehead, and Lady Ball rose from her chair with an angry look, as though asking the oilcloth manufacturer how he dared to make his way in there. The name of the Rubbs had been specially odious to all the family at the Cedars since Tom Mackenzie had carried his share of Jonathan Ball's money into the firm in the New Road. And Mr. Rubb's appearance was not calculated to mitigate this anger. Again he had got on those horrid yellow gloves, and again had dressed himself up to his idea of the garb of a man of fashion. To Margaret's eyes, in the midst of her own misfortunes, he was a thing horrible to

behold, as he came into that drawing-room. When she had seen him in his natural condition, at her brother's house, he had been, at any rate, unobjectionable to her; and when, on various occasions, he had talked to her about his own business, pleading his own cause and excusing his own fault, she had really liked him. There had been a moment or two, the moments of his bitterest confessions, in which she had in truth liked him much. But now! What would she not have given that the old servant should have taken upon himself to declare that she was not at home?

But there he was in her aunt's drawing-room, and she had nothing to do but to ask him to sit down.

"This is my aunt, Lady Ball," said Margaret.

"I hope I have the honour of seeing her ladyship quite well," said Mr. Rubb, bowing low before he ventured to seat himself.

Lady Ball would not condescend to say a word, but stared at him in a manner that would have driven him out of the room had he understood the nature of such looks on ladies' faces.

"I hope my sister-in-law and the children are well," said Margaret, with a violent attempt to make conversation.

"Pretty much as you left them, Miss Mackenzie; she takes on a good deal; but that's only human nature; eh, my lady?"

But her ladyship still would not condescend to speak a word.

Margaret did not know what further to say. All subjects on which it might have been possible for her to speak to Mr. Rubb were stopped from her in the presence of her aunt. Mr. Rubb knew of that great calamity of which, as yet, Lady Ball knew nothing,—of that great calamity to the niece, but great blessing, as it would be thought by the aunt. And she was in much fear lest Mr. Rubb should say something which might tend to divulge the secret.

"Did you come by the train?" she said, at last, reduced in her agony to utter the first unmeaning question of which she could think.

"Yes, Miss Mackenzie, I came by the train, and I am going back by the 5.45, if I can just be allowed to say a few words to you first."

"Does the gentleman mean in private?" asked Lady Ball.

"If you please, my lady," said Mr. Rubb, who was beginning to think that he did not like Lady Ball.

"If Miss Mackenzie wishes it, of course she can do so."

"It may be about my brother's affairs," said Margaret, getting up.

"It is nothing to me, my dear, whether they are your brother's or your own," said Lady Ball;

"you had better not interrupt your uncle in the study; but I dare say you'll find the dining-room disengaged."

So Miss Mackenzie led the way into the dining-room, and Mr. Rubb followed. There they found some of the girls, who stared very hard at Mr. Rubb, as they left the room at their cousin's request. As soon as they were left alone Mr. Rubb began his work manfully.

"Margaret," said he, "I hope you will let me call you so now that you are in trouble?"

To this she made no answer.

"But perhaps your trouble is over? Perhaps you have found out that it isn't all as you told us the other day?"

"No, Mr. Rubb; I have found nothing of that kind; I believe it is as I told you."

"Then I'll tell you what I propose. You haven't given up the fight, have you? You have not done anything?"

"I have done nothing as yet."

"Then I'll tell you my plan. Fight it out."

"I don't want to fight for anything that is not my own."

"But it is your own. It is your own of rights, even though it should not be so by some quibble of the lawyers. I don't believe twelve Englishmen would be found in London to give it to anybody else; I don't indeed."

"But my own lawyer tells me it isn't mine, Mr. Rubb."

"Never mind him; don't you give up anything. Don't you let them make you soft. When it comes to money nobody should give up anything. Now I'll tell you what I propose."

She now sat down and listened to him, while he stood over her. It was manifest that he was very eager, and in his eagerness he became loud, so that she feared his words might be heard out of the room.

"You know what my sentiments are," he said. At that moment she did not remember what his sentiments were, nor did she know what he meant. "They're the same now as ever. Whether you've got your fortune, or whether you've got nothing, they're the same. I've seen you tried, alongside of your brother, when he was a-dying, and, Margaret, I like you now better than ever I did."

"Mr. Rubb, at present, all that cannot mean anything."

"But doesn't it mean anything? By Jove! it does though. It means just this, that I'll make you Mrs. Rubb to-morrow, or as soon as Doctors' Commons, and all that, will let us do it; and I'll chance the money afterwards. Do you let it just go easy, and say nothing, and I'll fight them. If the worst comes to the worst, they'll be willing enough to cry halves with us. But, Margaret, if the

worst does come to be worse than that, you won't find me hard to you on that account. I shall always remember who helped me when I wanted help."

"I am sure, Mr. Rubb, I am much obliged to you."

"Don't talk about being obliged, but get up and give me your hand, and say it shall be a bargain." Then he tried to take her by the hand and raise her from the chair up towards him.

"No, no, no!" said she.

"But I say yes. Why should it be no? If there should never come a penny out of this property I will put a roof over your head, and will find you victuals and clothes respectably. Who will do better for you than that? And as for the fight, by Jove! I shall like it. You'll find they'll get nothing out of my hands till they have torn away my nails."

Here was a new phase in her life. Here was a man willing to marry her even though she had no assured fortune.

"Margaret," said he, pleading his cause again, "I have that love for you that I would take you though it was all gone, to the last farthing."

"It is all gone."

"Let that be as it may, we'll try it. But though it should be all gone, every shilling of it, still, will you be my wife?"

It was altogether a new phase, and one that was inexplicable to her. And this came from a man to whom she had once thought that she might bring herself to give her hand and her heart, and her money also. She did not doubt that if she took him at his word, he would be good to her, and provide her with shelter, and food and raiment, as he had promised her. Her heart was softened towards him, and she forgot his gloves and his shining boots. But she could not bring herself to say that she would love him, and be his wife. It seemed to her now that she was under the guidance of her cousin, and that she was pledged to do nothing of which he would disapprove. He would not approve of her accepting the hand of a man who would be resolved to litigate this matter with him.

"It cannot be," she said. "I feel how generous you are, but it cannot be."

"And why shouldn't it be?"

"Oh, Mr. Rubb, there are things one cannot explain."

"Margaret, think of it. How are you to do better?"

"Perhaps not; probably not. In many ways I am sure I could not do better. But it cannot be."

Not then, nor for the next twenty minutes, but at last he took his answer and went. He did this when he found that he had no more minutes to

spare if he intended to return by the 5.45 train. Then, with an angry gesture of his head, he left her, and hurried across to the front door. Then, as he went out, Mr. John Ball came in.

"Good evening, sir," said Mr. Rubb. "I am Mr. Samuel Rubb. I have just been seeing Miss Mackenzie, on business. Good evening, sir."

John Ball said never a word, and Samuel Rubb hurried across the grounds to the railway station.

CHAPTER V.

SHOWING HOW THE THIRD LOVER BEHAVED.

"WHAT has that man been here for?" Those were the first words which Mr. Ball spoke to his cousin after shutting the hall-door behind Mr. Rubb's back. When the door was closed he turned round and saw Margaret as she was coming out of the dining-room, and in a voice that sounded to her as though he were angry, asked her the above question.

"He came to see me, John," said Miss Mackenzie, going back into the dining-room. "He was my brother's partner."

"He said he came upon business; what business could he have?"

It was not very easy for her to tell him what had been Mr. Rubb's business. She had no wish to keep anything secret from her cousin, but she did not know how to describe the scene which had just taken place, or how to acknowledge that the man had come there to ask her to marry him.

"Does he know anything of this matter of your money?" continued Mr. Ball.

"Oh yes; he knows it all. He was in Gower Street when I told my sister-in-law."

"And he came to advise you about it?"

"Yes; he did advise me about it. But his advice I shall not take."

"And what did he advise?"

Then Margaret told him that Mr. Rubb had counselled her to fight it out to the last, in order that a compromise might at any rate be obtained.

"If it has no selfish object in view I am far from saying that he is wrong," said John Ball. "It is what I should advise a friend to do under similar circumstances."

"It is not what I shall do, John."

"No; you are like a lamb that gives itself up to the slaughterer. I have been with one lawyer or the other all the day, and the end of it is that there is no use on earth in your going to London to-morrow, nor, as far as I can see, for another week to come. The two lawyers together have referred the case to counsel for opinion,—for an amicable opinion as they call it. From what they all say, Margaret, it seems to me clear that the matter will go against you."

"I have expected nothing else since Mr. Slow spoke to me."

"But no doubt you can make a fight, as your friend says."

"I don't want to fight, John; you know that."

"Mr. Slow won't let you give it up without a contest. He suggested a compromise,—that you and I should divide it. But I hate compromises." She looked up into his face, but said nothing. "The truth is, I have been so wronged in the matter, the whole thing has been so cruel, it has, all of it together, so completely ruined me and my prospects in life, that were it any one but you, I would sooner have a lawsuit than give up one penny of what is left." Again she looked at him, but he went on speaking of it without observing her. "Think what it has been, Margaret! The whole of this property was once mine!—not the half of it only that has been called yours, but the whole of it! The income was actually paid for one half-year to a separate banking account on my behalf, before I was of age. Yes, paid to me, and I had it! My uncle Jonathan had no more legal right to take it away from me than you have to take the coat off my back. Think of that, and of what four-and-twenty thousand pounds would have done for me and my family from that time to this. There have been nearly thirty years of this robbery!"

"It was not my fault, John."

"No; it was not your fault. But if your brothers could pay me back all that they really owe me, all that the money would now be worth, it would come to nearly a hundred thousand pounds. After that, what is a man to say when he is asked to compromise? As far as I can see, there is not a shadow of a doubt about it. Mr. Slow does not pretend that there is a doubt. How they can fail to see the justice of it is what passes my understanding!"

"Mr. Slow will give up at once, I suppose, if I ask him?"

"I don't want you to ask him. I would rather that you didn't say a word to him about it. There is a debt too from that man Rubb which they advise me to abandon."

In answer to this, Margaret could say nothing, for she knew well that her trust in the interest of that money was the only hope she had of any maintenance for her sister-in-law.

After a few minutes' silence he again spoke to her. "He desires to know whether you want money for immediate use."

"Who wants to know?"

"Mr. Slow."

"Oh no, John. I have money at the bankers, but I will not touch it."

"How much is there at the bankers?"

"There is more than three hundred pounds;

but very little more, perhaps three hundred and ten."

"You may have that."

"John, I don't want anything that is not my own; not though I had to walk out to earn my bread in the streets to-morrow."

"That is your own, I tell you. The tenants have been ordered not to pay any further rents, till they receive notice. You can make them pay, nevertheless, if you wish it, at least; you might do so, till some legal steps were taken."

"Of course, I shall do nothing of the kind. It was Mr. Slow's people who used to get the money. And am I not to go up to London to-morrow?"

"You can go if you choose, but you will learn nothing. I told Mr. Slow that I would bid you wait till I heard from him again. It is time now for us to get ready for dinner."

Then, as he was going to leave the room, she took him by the coat and held him again,—held him as fast as she had done on the pavement in Lincoln's Inn Fields. There was a soft, womanly, trusting weakness in the manner of her motion as she did this, which touched him now as it had touched him then.

"John," she said, "if there is to be so much delay, I must not stay here."

"Why not, Margaret?"

"My aunt does not like my staying; I can see

that; and I don't think it is fair to do so while she does not know all about it. It is something like cheating her out of the use of the house."

"Then I will tell her."

"What, all? Had I not better go first?"

"No; you cannot go. Where are you to go to? I will tell her everything to-night. I had almost made up my mind to do so already. It will be better that they should both know it,—my father and my mother. My father probably will be required to say all that he knows about the matter."

"I shall be ready to go at once if she wishes it," said Margaret.

To this he made no answer, but went up-stairs to his bedroom, and there, as he dressed, thought again, and again, and again of his cousin Margaret. What should he do for her, and in what way should he treat her? The very name of the Mackenzies he had hated of old, and their names were now more hateful to him than ever. He had correctly described his own feelings towards them when he said, either truly or untruly, that they had deprived him of that which would have made his whole life prosperous instead of the reverse. And it seemed as though he had really thought that they had been in fault in this;—that they had defrauded him. It did not, apparently, occur to him that the only persons he could blame were

his uncle Jonathan and his own lawyers, who, at his uncle's death, had failed to discover in his behalf what really were his rights. Walter Mackenzie had been a poor creature who could do nothing. Tom Mackenzie had been a mean creature who had allowed himself to be cozened in a petty trade out of the money which he had wrongfully acquired. They were odious to him, and he hated their memories. He would fain have hated all that belonged to them, had he been able. But he was not able to hate this woman who clung to him, and trusted him, and felt no harsh feelings towards him though he was going to take from her everything that had been hers. She trusted him for advice even though he was her adversary! Would he have trusted her or any other human being under such circumstances? No, by heavens! But not the less on that account did he acknowledge to himself that this confidence in her was very gracious.

That evening passed by very quietly as far as Miss Mackenzie was concerned. She had sometime since, immediately on her last arrival at the Cedars, offered to relieve her aunt from the trouble of making tea, and the duty had then been given up to her. But since Lady Ball's failure in obtaining possession of her niece's secret, the post of honour had been taken away.

"You don't make it as your uncle likes it," Lady Ball had said.

She made her little offer again on this evening, but it was rejected.

"Thank you, no; I believe I had better do it myself," had been the answer.

"Why can't you let Margaret make tea? I'm sure she does it very well," said John.

"I don't see that you can be a judge, seeing that you take none," his mother replied; "and if you please, I'd rather make the tea in my own house as long as I can."

This little allusion to her own house was, no doubt, a blow at her son, to punish him in that he had dictated to her in that matter of the continued entertainment of her guest; but Margaret also felt it to be a blow at her, and resolved that she would escape from the house with as little further delay as might be possible. Beyond this, the evening was very quiet, till Margaret, a little after tea, took her candle and went off wearily to her room.

But then the business of the day as regarded the Cedars began; for John Ball, before he went to bed, told both his father and his mother the whole story;—the story, that is, as far as the money was concerned, and also as far as Margaret's conduct to him was concerned; but of his own feelings towards her he said nothing.

"She has behaved admirably, mother," he said; "you must acknowledge that, and I think that she is entitled to all the kindness we can show her."

"I have been kind to her," Lady Ball answered.

This had taken place in Lady Ball's own room, after they had left Sir John. The tidings had taken the old man so much by surprise, that he had said little or nothing. Even his caustic ill-nature had deserted him, except on one occasion, when he remarked that it was like his brother Jonathan to do as much harm with his money as was within his reach.

"My memory in such a matter is worth nothing,—absolutely nothing," the old man had said. "I always supposed something was wrong. I remember that. But I left it all to the lawyers."

In Lady Ball's room the conversation was prolonged to a late hour of the night, and took various twists and turns, as such conversations will do.

"What are we to do about the young woman?" That was Lady Ball's main question, arising, no doubt, from the reflection that the world would lean very heavily on them if they absolutely turned her out to starve in the streets.

John Ball made no proposition in answer to this, having not as yet made up his mind as to

what his own wishes were with reference to the young woman. Then his mother made her proposition.

"Of course that money due by the Rubbs must be paid. Let her take that."

But her son made no reply to this other than that he feared the Rubbs were not in a condition to pay the money.

"They would pay her the interest at any rate," said Lady Ball, "till she had got into some other way of life. She would do admirably for a companion to an old lady, because her manners are good, and she does not want much waiting upon herself."

On the next morning Miss Mackenzie trembled in her shoes as she came down to breakfast. Her uncle, whom she feared the most, would not be there; but the meeting with her aunt, when her aunt would know that she was a pauper and that she had for the last week been an impostor, was terrible to her by anticipation. But she had not calculated that her aunt's triumph in this newly-acquired wealth for the Ball family would, for the present, cover any other feeling that might exist. Her aunt met her with a gracious smile, was very urbane in selecting a chair for her at prayers close to her own, and pressed upon her a piece of buttered toast out of a little dish that was always prepared for her ladyship's own consump-

tion. After breakfast John Ball again went to town. He went daily to town during the present crisis; and, on this occasion, his mother made no remarks as to the urgency of his business. When he was gone Lady Ball began to potter about the house, after her daily custom, and was longer in her pottering than was usual with her. Miss Mackenzie helped the younger children in their lessons, as she often did; and when time for luncheon came, she had almost begun to think that she was to be allowed to escape any conversation with her aunt touching the great money question. But it was not so. At one she was told that luncheon and the children's dinner was postponed till two, and she was asked by the servant to go up to Lady Ball in her own room.

"Come and sit down, my dear," said Lady Ball, in her sweetest voice. "It has got to be very cold, and you had better come near the fire."

Margaret did as she was bidden, and sat herself down in the chair immediately opposite to her aunt.

"This is a wonderful story that John has told me," continued her aunt;—"very wonderful."

"It is sad enough for me," said Margaret, who did not feel inclined to be so self-forgetful in talking to her aunt as she had been with her cousin.

"It is sad for you, Margaret, no doubt. But I am sure you have within you that conscientious

rectitude of purpose that you would not wish to keep anything for yourself that in truth belongs to another."

To this Margaret answered nothing, and her aunt went on.

"It is a great change to you, no doubt; and, of course, that is the point on which I wish to speak to you most especially. I have told John that something must be done for you."

This jarred terribly on poor Margaret's feelings. Her cousin had said nothing, not a word as to doing anything for her. The man who had told her of his love, and asked her to be his wife, not twelve months since,—who had pressed her to be of all women the dearest to him and the nearest,—had talked to her of her ruin without offering her aid, although this ruin to her would enrich him very greatly. She had expected nothing from him, had wanted nothing from him; but by degrees, when absent from him, the feeling had grown upon her that he had been hard to her in abstaining from expressions of commiseration. She had yielded to him in the whole affair, assuring him that nothing should be done by her to cause him trouble; and she would have been grateful to him if in return he had said something to her of her future mode of life. She had intended to speak to him about the hospital; but she had thought that she might abstain from

doing so till he himself should ask some question as to her plans. He had asked no such question, and she was now almost determined to go away without troubling him on the subject. But if he, who had once professed to love her, would make no suggestion as to her future life, she could ill bear that any offer of the kind should come from her aunt, who, as she knew, had only regarded her for her money.

"I would rather," she replied, "that nothing should be said to him on the subject."

"And why not, Margaret?"

"I desire that I may be no burden to him or to anybody. I will go away and earn my bread; and even if I cannot do that, my relations shall not be troubled by hearing from me."

She said this without sobbing, but not without that almost hysterical emotion which indicates that tears are being suppressed with pain.

"That is false pride, my dear."

"Very well, aunt. I dare say it is false; but it is my pride. I may be allowed to keep my pride, though I can keep nothing else."

"What you say about earning your bread is very proper; and I and John and your uncle also have been thinking of that. But I should be glad that some additional assistance should be provided for you, in the event of old age, you know, or illness. Now, as to earning your bread, I remarked

to John that you were peculiarly qualified for being a lady's companion."

"For being what, aunt?"

"For being companion to some lady in the decline of life, who would want to have some nice-mannered person always with her. You have the advantage of being lady-like and gentle, and I think that you are patient by disposition."

"Aunt," said Miss Mackenzie, and her voice as she spoke was hardly gentle, nor was it indicative of much patience. Her hysterics also seemed for the time to have given way to her strong passionate feeling. "Aunt," she said, "I would sooner take a broom in my hand, and sweep a crossing in London, than lead such a life as that. What! make myself the slave of some old woman, who would think that she had bought the power of tyrannizing over me by allowing me to sit in the same room with her! No, indeed! It may very likely be the case that I may have to serve such a one in the kitchen, but it shall be in the kitchen, and not in the drawing-room. I have not had much experience in life, but I have had enough to learn that lesson!"

Lady Ball, who during the first part of the conversation had been unrolling and winding a great ball of worsted, now sat perfectly still, holding the ball in her lap, and staring at her niece. She was a quick-witted woman, and it no

doubt occurred to her that the great objection to living with an old lady, which her niece had expressed so passionately, must have come from the trial of that sort of life which she had had at the Cedars. And there was enough in Miss Mackenzie's manner to justify Lady Ball in thinking that some such expression of feeling as this had been intended by her. She had never before heard Margaret speak out so freely, even in the days of her undoubted heiress-ship; and now, though she greatly disliked her niece, she could not avoid mingling something of respect and something almost amounting to fear with her dislike. She did not dare to go on unwinding her worsted, and giving the advantage of her condescension to a young woman who spoke out at her in that way.

"I thought I was advising you for the best," she said, "and I had hoped that you would have been thankful."

"I don't know what may be for the best," said Margaret, again bordering upon the hysterical in the tremulousness of her voice, "but that I'm sure would be for the worst. However, I've made up my mind to nothing as yet."

"No, my dear; of course not; but we all must think of it, you know."

Her cousin John had not thought of it, and she did not want any one else to do so. She especially

did not want her aunt to think of it. But it was no doubt necessary that her aunt should consider how long she would be required to provide a home for her impoverished niece, and Margaret's mind at once applied itself to that view of the subject.

"I have made up my mind that I will go to London next week, and then I must settle upon something."

"You mean when you go to Mr. Slow's?"

"I mean that I shall go for good. I have a little money by me, which John says I may use, and I shall take a lodging till—till—till——" Then she could not go on any further.

"You can stay here, Margaret, if you please; —that is till something more is settled about all this affair."

"I will go on Monday, aunt. I have made up my mind to that." It was now Saturday. "I will go on Monday. It will be better for all parties that I should be away." Then she got up, and waiting no further speech from her aunt, took herself off to her own room.

She did not see her aunt again till dinner-time, and then neither of them spoke to each other. Lady Ball thought that she had reason to be offended, and Margaret would not be the first to speak. In the evening, before the whole family, she told her cousin that she had made up her

mind to go up to London on Monday. He begged her to reconsider her resolution, but when she persisted that she would do so, he did not then argue the question any further. But on the Sunday he implored her not to go as yet, and did obtain her consent to postpone her departure till Tuesday. He wished, he said, to be at any rate one day more in London before she went. On the Sunday she was closeted with her uncle who also sent for her, and to him she suggested her plan of becoming nurse at a hospital. He remarked that he hoped that would not be necessary.

"Something will be necessary," she said, "as I don't mean to eat anybody's bread but my own."

In answer to this he said that he would speak to John, and then that interview was over. On the Monday morning John Ball said something respecting Margaret to his mother which acerbated that lady more than ever against her niece. He had not proposed that anything special should be done; but he had hinted, when his mother complained of Margaret, that Margaret's conduct was everything that it ought to be.

"I believe you would take anybody's part against me," Lady Ball had said, and then as a matter of course she had been very cross. The whole of that day was terrible to Miss Mackenzie, and she resolved that nothing said by her cousin

should induce her to postpone her departure for another day.

In order to insure this by a few minutes' private conversation with him, and also with the view of escaping for some short time from the house, she walked down to the station in the evening to meet her cousin. The train by which he arrived reached Twickenham at five o'clock, and the walk occupied about twenty minutes. She met him just as he was coming out of the station gate, and at once told him that she had come there for the sake of walking back with him and talking to him. He thanked her, and said that he was very glad thus to meet her. He also wanted to speak to her very particularly. Would she take his arm?

She took his arm, and then began with a quick, tremulous voice to tell him of her sufferings at the house. She threw no blame on her aunt that she could avoid, but declared it to be natural that under such circumstances as those now existing her prolonged sojourn at her aunt's house should be unpleasant to both of them. In answer to all this, John Ball said nothing, but once or twice lifted up his left hand so as to establish Margaret's arm more firmly on his own. She hardly noticed the motion, but yet she was aware that it was intended for kindness, and then she broke forth with a rapid voice as to her plan about the hospi-

tal. "I think we can manage better than that, at any rate," said he, stopping her in the path when this proposal met his ear. But she went on to declare that she would like it, that she was strong and qualified for such work, that it would satisfy her aspirations, and be fit for her. And then, after that, she declared that nothing should induce her to undertake the kind of life that had been suggested by her aunt. "I quite agree with you there," said he; "quite. I hate tabbies as much as you do."

They had now come to a little gate, of which John Ball kept a key, and which led into the grounds belonging to the Cedars. The grounds were rather large, and the path through them extended for half a mile, but the land was let off to a grazier. When inside the wall, however, they were private; and Mr. Ball, as soon as he had locked the gate behind him, stopped her in the dark path, and took both her hands in his. The gloom of the evening had now come round them, and the thick trees which formed the belt of the place, joined to the high wall, excluded from them nearly all what light remained.

"And now," said he, "I will tell you my plan."

"What plan?" said she; but her voice was very low.

"I proposed it once before, but you would not have it then."

When she heard this, she at once drew both her hands from him, and stood before him in an agony of doubt. Even in the gloom, the trees were going round her, and everything, even her thoughts, were obscure and misty.

"Margaret," said he "you shall be my wife, and the mother of my children, and I will love you as I loved Rachel before. I loved you when I asked you at Christmas, but I did not love you then as I love you now."

She still stood before him, but answered him not a word. How often since the tidings of her loss had reached her had the idea of such a meeting as this come before her; how often had she seemed to listen to such words as those he now spoke to her! Not that she had expected it, or hoped for it, or even thought of it as being in truth possible; but her imagination had been at work, during the long hours of the nights, and the romance of the thing had filled her mind, and the poetry of it had been beautiful to her. She had known,—she had told herself that she knew,—that no man would so sacrifice himself; certainly no such man as John Ball, with all his children and his weary love of money! But now the poetry had come to be fact, and the romance had turned itself into reality, and the picture formed by her imagination had become a living truth. The very

words of which she had dreamed had been spoken to her.

"Shall it be so, my dear?" he said, again taking one of her hands. "You want to be a nurse; will you be my nurse? Nay; I will not ask, but it shall be so. They say that the lovers who demand are ever the most successful. I make my demand. Tell me, Margaret, will you obey me?"

He had walked on now, but in order that his time might be sufficient, he led her away from the house. She was following him, hardly knowing whither she was going.

"Susanna," said he, "shall come and live with the others; one more will make no difference."

"And my aunt?" said Margaret.

It was the first word she had spoken since the gate had been locked behind her, and this word was spoken in a whisper.

"I hope my mother may feel that such a marriage will best conduce to my happiness; but, Margaret, nothing that my mother can say will change me. You and I have known something of each other now. Of you, from the way in which things have gone, I have learned much. Few men, I take it, see so much of their future wives as I have seen of you. If you can love me as your husband, say so at once honestly, and then leave the rest to me."

"I will," she said, again whispering; and then

she clung to his hand, and for a minute or two he had his arm round her waist. Then he took her, and kissed her lips, and told her that he would take care of her, and watch for her, and keep her, if possible, from trouble.

Ah, me, how many years had rolled by since last she had been kissed in that way! Once, and once only, had Harry Handcock so far presumed, and so far succeeded. And now, after a dozen years or more, that game had begun again with her! She had boxed Harry Handcock's ears when he had kissed her; but now, from her lover of to-day, she submitted to the ceremony very tamely.

"Oh, John," she said, "how am I to thank you?" But the thanks were tendered for the promise of his care, and not for the kiss.

I think there was but little more said between them before they reached the door-step. When there, Mr. Ball, speaking already with something of marital authority, gave her his instructions.

"I shall tell my mother this evening," he said, "as I hate mysteries; and I shall tell my father also. Of course there may be something disagreeable said before we all shake down happily in our places, but I shall look to you, Margaret, to be firm."

"I shall be firm," she said, "if you are."

"I shall be firm," was the reply; and then they went into the house.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. MAGUIRE GOES TO LONDON ON BUSINESS.

Mr. Maguire made up his mind to go to London, to look after his lady-love, but when he found himself there he did not quite know what to do. It is often the case with us that we make up our minds for great action,—that in some special crisis of our lives we resolve that something must be done, and that we make an energetic start; but we find very soon that we do not know how to go on doing anything. It was so with Mr. Maguire. When he had secured a bed at a small public-house, near the Great Western railway station,—thinking, no doubt, that he would go to the great hotel on his next coming to town, should he then have obtained the lady's fortune,—he scarcely knew what step he would next take. Margaret's last letter had been written to him from the Cedars, but he thought it probable that she might only have gone there for a day or two. He knew the address of the house in Gower Street, and at last

resolved that he would go boldly in among the enemy there; for he was assured that the family of the lady's late brother were his special enemies in this case. It was considerably past noon when he reached London, and it was about three when, with a hesitating hand, but a loud knock, he presented himself at Mrs. Mackenzie's door.

He first asked for Miss Mackenzie, and was told that she was not staying there. Was he thereupon to leave his card and go away? He had told himself that in this pursuit of the heiress he would probably be called upon to dare much, and if he did not begin to show some daring at once, how could he respect himself, or trust to himself for future daring? So he boldly asked for Mrs. Mackenzie, and was at once shown into the parlour. There sat the widow, in her full lugubrious weeds, there sat Miss Colza, and there sat Mary Jane, and they were all busy hemming, darning, and clipping; turning old sheets into new ones; for now it was more than ever necessary that Mrs. Mackenzie should make money at once, by taking in lodgers. When Mr. Maguire was shown into the room each lady rose from her chair, with her sheet in her hands and in her lap, and then, as he stood before them, at the other side of the table, each lady again sat down.

"A gentleman as is asking for Miss Margaret," the servant had said; that same cook to whom

Mr. Grandairs had been so severe on the occasion of Mrs. Mackenzie's dinner party. The other girl had been unnecessary to them in their poverty, and had left them.

"My name is Maguire, the Rev. Mr. Maguire, from Littlebath, where I had the pleasure of knowing Miss Mackenzie."

Then the widow asked him to take a chair, and he took a chair.

"My sister-in-law is not with us at present," said Mrs. Mackenzie.

"She is staying for a visit with her aunt, Lady Ball, at the Cedars, Twickenham," said Mary Jane, who had contrived to drop her sheet, and hustle it under the table with her feet, as soon as she learned that the visitor was a clergyman.

"Lady Ball is the lady of Sir John Ball, Baronet," said Miss Colza, whose good nature made her desirous of standing up for the honour of the family with which she was, for the time, domesticated.

"I knew she had been at Lady Ball's," said the clergyman, "as I heard from her from thence; but I thought she had probably returned."

"Oh dear, no," said the widow, "she ain't returned here, nor don't mean. We haven't the room for her, and that's the truth. Have we, Mary Jane?"

"That we have not, mamma; and I don't

think aunt Margaret would think of such a thing."

Then, thought Mr. Maguire, the Balls must have got hold of the heiress, and not the Mackenzies, and my battle must be fought at the Cedars, and not here. Still, as he was there, he thought he might possibly obtain some further information; and this would be the easier, if, as appeared to be the case, there was enmity between the Gower Street family and their relative.

"Has Miss Mackenzie gone to live permanently at the Cedars?" he asked.

"Not that I know of," said the widow.

"It isn't at all unlikely, mamma, that it may be so, when you consider everything. It's just the sort of way in which they'll most likely get over her."

"Mary Jane, hold your tongue," said her mother; "you shouldn't say things of that sort before strangers."

"Though I may not have the pleasure of knowing you and your amiable family," said Mr. Maguire, smiling his sweetest, "I am by no means a stranger to Miss Mackenzie."

Then the ladies all looked at him, and thought that they had never seen anything so terrible as that squint.

"Miss Mackenzie is making a long visit at the Cedars," said Miss Colza, "that is all we know

at present. I am told the Balls are very nice people, but perhaps a little worldly-minded; that's to be expected, however, from people who live out of the west-end from London. I live in Finsbury Square, or at least, I did before I came here, and I ain't a bit ashamed to own it. But of course the west-end is the nicest."

Then Mr. Maguire got up, saying that he should probably do himself the pleasure of calling on Miss Mackenzie at the Cedars, and went his way.

"I wonder what he's after," said Mrs. Mackenzie, as soon as the door was shut.

"Perhaps he came to tell her to bear it all with Christian resignation," said Miss Colza; "they always do come when anything's in the wind like that; they like to know everything before anybody else."

"It's my belief he's after her money," said Mrs. Mackenzie.

"With such a squint as that!" said Mary Jane; "I wouldn't have him though he was made of money, and I hadn't a farthing."

"Beauty is but skin deep," said Miss Colza.

"And it's manners to wait till you are asked," said Mrs. Mackenzie.

Mary Jane chucked up her head with disdain, thereby indicating that though she had not been asked, and though beauty is but skin deep, still she held the same opinion.

Mr. Maguire, as he went away to a clerical advertising office in the neighbourhood of Exeter Hall, thought over the matter profoundly. It was clear enough to him that the Mackenzies of Gower Street were not interfering with him; very probably they might have hoped and attempted to keep the heiress among them; that assertion that there was no room for her in the house,—as though they were and ever had been averse to having her with them,—seemed to imply that such was the case. It was the natural language of a disappointed woman. But if so, that hope was now over with them. And then the young lady had plainly exposed the suspicions which they all entertained as to the Balls. These grand people at the Cedars, this baronet's family at Twickenham, must have got her to come among them with the intention of keeping her there. It did not occur to him that the baronet or the baronet's son would actually want Miss Mackenzie's money. He presumed baronets to be rich people; but still they might very probably be as dogs in the manger, and desirous of preventing their relative from doing with her money that active service to humanity in general which would be done were she to marry a deserving clergyman who had nothing of his own.

He made his visit to the advertising office, and learned that clergymen without cures were at

present drugs in the market. He couldn't understand how this should be the case, seeing that the newspapers were constantly declaring that the supply of University clergymen were becoming less and less every day. He had come from Trinity, Dublin, and after the success of his career at Littlebath, was astonished that he should not be snapped at by the retailers of curacies.

On the next day he visited Twickenham. Now, on the morning of that very day Margaret Mackenzie first woke to the consciousness that she was the promised wife of her cousin John Ball. There was great comfort in the thought. It was not only, nor even chiefly, that she who, on the preceding morning, had awaken to the remembrance of her utter destitution, now felt that all those terrible troubles were over. It was not simply that her great care had been vanquished for her. It was this, that the man who had a second time come to her asking for her love, had now given her all-sufficient evidence that he did so for the sake of her love. He, who was so anxious for money, had shown her that he could care for her more even than he cared for gold. As she thought of this, and made herself happy in the thought, she would not rise at once from her bed, but curled herself in the clothes and hugged herself in her joy.

"I should have taken him before, at once,

instantly, if I could have thought that it was so," she said to herself; "but this is a thousand times better."

Then she found that the pillow beneath her cheek was wet with her tears.

On the preceding evening she had been very silent and demure, and her betrothed had also been silent. There had been no words about the tea-making, and Lady Ball had been silent also. As far as she knew, Margaret was to go on the following day, but she would say nothing on the subject. Margaret, indeed, had commenced her packing, and did not know when she went to bed whether she was to go or not. She rather hoped that she might be allowed to go, as her aunt would doubtless be disagreeable; but in that, and in all matters now, she would of course be guided implicity by Mr. Ball. He had told her to be firm, and of her own firmness she had no doubt whatever. Lady Ball, with all her anger, or with all her eloquence, should not talk her out of her husband. She could be firm, and she had no doubt that John Ball could be firm also.

Nevertheless, when she was dressing, she did not fail to tell herself that she might have a bad time of it that morning,—and a bad time of it for some days to come, if it was John's intention that she should remain at the Cedars. She was convinced that Lady Ball would not welcome her

as a daughter-in-law now as she would have done when the property was thought to belong to her. What right had she to expect such welcome? No doubt some hard things would be said to her; but she knew her own courage, and was sure that she could bear any hard things with such a hope within her breast as that which she now possessed. She left her room a little earlier than usual, thinking that she might thus meet her cousin and receive his orders. And in this she was not disappointed; he was in the hall as she came down, and she was able to smile on him, and press his hand, and make her morning greetings to him with some tenderness in her voice. He looked heavy about the face, and almost more careworn than usual, but he took her hand and led her into the breakfast-room.

"Did you tell your mother, John?" she said, standing very close to him, almost leaning upon his shoulder.

He, however, did not probably want such signs of love as this, and moved a step away from her.

"Yes," said he, "I told both my father and my mother. What she says to you, you must hear, and bear it quietly for my sake."

"I will," said Margaret.

"I think that she is unreasonable, but still she is my mother."

"I shall always remember that, John."

"And she is old, and things have not always gone well with her. She says, too, that you have been impertinent to her."

Margaret's face became very red at this charge, but she made no immediate reply.

"I don't think you could mean to be impertinent."

"Certainly not, John; but, of course, I shall feel myself much more bound to her now than I was before."

"Yes, of course; but I wish that nothing had occurred to make her so angry with you."

"I don't think that I was impertinent, John, though perhaps it might seem so. When she was talking about my being a companion to a lady, I perhaps answered her sharply. I was so determined that I wouldn't lead that sort of life, that, perhaps, I said more than I should have done. You know, John, that it hasn't been quite pleasant between us for the last few days."

John did know this, and he knew also that there was not much probability of pleasantness for some days to come. His mother's last words to him on the preceding evening, as he was leaving her after having told his story, did not give much promise of pleasantness for Margaret. "John," she had said, "nothing on earth shall induce me to live in the same house with Margaret Mackenzie as your wife. If you choose to

break up everything for her sake, you can do it. I cannot control you. But remember, it will be your doing."

Margaret then asked him what she was to do, and where she was to live. She would fain have asked him when they were to be married, but she did not dare to make inquiry on that point. He told her that, for the present, she must remain at the Cedars. If she went away it would be regarded as an open quarrel, and moreover, he did not wish that she should live by herself in London lodgings. "We shall be able to see how things go for a day or two," he said. To this she submitted without a murmur, and then Lady Ball came into the room.

They were both very nervous in watching her first behaviour, but were not at all prepared for the line of conduct which she adopted. John Ball and Margaret had separated when they heard the rustle of her dress. He had made a step towards the window, and she had retreated to the other side of the fire-place. Lady Ball, on entering the room, had been nearest to Margaret, but she walked round the table away from her usual place for prayers, and accosted her son.

"Good morning, John," she said, giving him her hand.

Margaret waited a second or two, and then addressed her aunt.

"Good morning, aunt," she said, stepping half across the rug.

But her aunt, turning her back to her, moved into the embrasure of the window. It had been decided that there was to be an absolute cut between them! As long as she remained in that house Lady Ball would not speak to her. John said nothing, but a black frown came upon his brow. Poor Margaret retired, rebuked, to her corner by the chimney. Just at that moment the girls and children rushed in from the study, with the daily governess who came every morning, and Sir John rang for the servants to come to prayers.

I wonder whether that old lady's heart was at all softened as she prayed?—whether it ever occurred to her to think that there was any meaning in that form of words she used, when she asked her God to forgive her as she might forgive others? Not that Margaret had in truth trespassed against her at all; but, doubtless, she regarded her niece as a black trespasser, and as being quite qualified for forgiveness. Could she have brought herself to forgive? But I fear that the form of words on that occasion meant nothing, and that she had been delivered from no evil during those moments she had been on her knees. Margaret sat down in her accustomed place, but no notice was taken of her by her aunt. When the tea had been poured out, John got up from his

seat and asked his mother which was Margaret's cup.

"My dear," said she, "if you will sit down Miss Mackenzie shall have her tea."

"I will take it to her," said he.

"John," said his mother, drawing her chair somewhat away from the table, "if you flurry me in this way, you will drive me out of the room."

Then he had sat down, and Margaret received her cup in the usual way. The girls and children stared at each other, and the governess, who always breakfasted at the house, did not dare to lift her eyes from off her plate.

Margaret longed for an opportunity of starting with John Ball, and walking with him to the station, but no such opportunity came in her way. It was his custom always to go up to his father before he left home, and on this occasion Margaret did not see him after he quitted the breakfast table. When the clatter of the knives and cups was over, and the eating and drinking was at an end, Lady Ball left the room, and Margaret began to think what she would do. She could not remain about the house in her aunt's way, without being spoken to, or speaking. So she went to her room, resolving that she would not leave it till the carriage had taken off Sir John and her aunt. Then she would go out for her walk, and would again meet her cousin at the station.

From her bedroom window she could see the sweep before the front of the house, and at two o'clock she saw and heard the lumbering of the carriage as it came to the door, and then she put on her hat to be ready for her walk; but her uncle and aunt did not, as it seemed, come out, and the carriage remained there as a fixture. This had been the case for some twenty minutes, when there came a knock at her own door, and the maidservant told her that her aunt wished to see her in the drawing-room.

"To see me?" said Margaret, thoroughly surprised, and not a little dismayed.

"Yes, miss; and there's a gentleman there who asked for you when he first come."

Now, indeed, she was dismayed. Who could be the gentleman? Was it Mr. Slow, or a myrmidon from Mr. Slow's legal abode? Or was it Mr. Rubb with his yellow gloves again? Whoever it was there must be something very special in his mission, as her aunt had, in consequence, deferred her drive, and was also apparently about to drop her purpose of cutting her niece's acquaintance in her own house.

But we will go back to Mr. Maguire. He had passed the evening and the morning in thinking over the method of his attack, and had at last resolved that he would be very bold. He would go down to the Cedars, and claim Margaret as

his affianced bride. He went, therefore, down to the Cedars, and in accordance with his plan as arranged, he gave his card to the servant, and asked if he could see Sir John Ball alone. Now, Sir John Ball never saw any one on business, or, indeed, not on business; and, after a while, word was brought out to Mr. Maguire that he could see Lady Ball, but that Sir John was not well enough to receive any visitors. Lady Ball, Mr. Maguire thought, would suit him better than Sir John. He signified his will accordingly, and on being shown into the drawing-room, found her ladyship there alone.

It must be acknowledged that he was a brave man, and that he was doing a bold thing. He knew that he should find himself among enemies, and that his claim would be ignored and ridiculed by the persons whom he was about to attack; he knew that everybody, on first seeing him, was affrighted and somewhat horrified; he knew too, —at least, we must presume that he knew,—that the lady herself had given him no promise. But he thought it possible, nay, almost probable, that she would turn to him if she saw him again; that she might own him as her own; that her feelings might be strong enough in his favour to induce her to throw off the thraldom of her relatives, and that he might make good his ground in her breast, even if he could not

bear her away in triumph out of the hands of his enemies.

When he entered the room Lady Ball looked at him and shuddered. People always did shudder when they saw him for the first time.

"Lady Ball," said he, "I am the Rev. Mr. Maguire, of Littlebath."

She was holding his card in her hand, and having notified to him that she was aware of the fact he had mentioned, asked him to sit down.

"I have called," said he, taking his seat, "hoping to be allowed to speak to you on a subject of extreme delicacy."

"Indeed," said Lady Ball, thinking to catch his eye, and failing in the effort.

"I may say of very extreme delicacy. I believe your niece, Miss Margaret Mackenzie, is staying here?"

In answer to this, Lady Ball acknowledged that Miss Mackenzie was now at the Cedars.

"Have you any objection, Lady Ball, to allowing me to see her in your presence?"

Lady Ball was a quick-thinking, intelligent, and, at the same time, prudent old lady, and she gave no answer to this before she had considered the import of the question. Why should this clergyman want to see Margaret? And would his seeing her conduce most to her own success, or to Margaret's? Then there was the fact that Mar-

garet was of an age which entitled her to the right of seeing any visitor who might call on her. Thinking over all this as best she could in the few moments at her command, and thinking also of this clergyman's stipulation that she was to be present at the interview, she said that she had no objection whatever. She would send for Miss Mackenzie.

She rose to ring the bell, but Mr. Maguire, also rising from his chair, stopped her hand.

"Pardon me for a moment," said he. "Before you call Margaret to come down I would wish to explain to you for what purpose I have come here."

Lady Ball, when she heard the man call her niece by her Christian name, listened with all her ears. Under no circumstances but one could such a man call such a woman by her Christian name in such company.

"Lady Ball," he said, "I do not know whether you may be aware of it or no, but I am engaged to marry your niece."

Lady Ball, who had not yet resumed her seat, now did so.

"I had not heard of it," she said.

"It may be so," said Mr. Maguire.

"It is so," said Lady Ball.

"Very probably. There are many reasons which operate upon young ladies in such a con-

dition to keep their secret even from their nearest relatives. For myself, being a clergyman of the Church of England, professing evangelical doctrines, and therefore, as I had need not say, averse to everything that may have about it even a seeming of impropriety, I think it best to declare the fact to you, even though in doing so I may perhaps give some offence to dear Margaret."

It must, I think, be acknowledged that Mr. Maguire was true to himself, and that he was conducting his case at any rate with courage.

Lady Ball was doubtful what she would do. It was on her tongue to tell the man that her niece's fortune was gone. But she remembered that she might probably advance her own interests by securing an interview between the two lovers of Littlebath in her own presence. She never for a moment doubted that Mr. Maguire's statement was true. It never occurred to her that there had been no such engagement. She felt confident from the moment in which Mr. Maguire's important tidings had reached her ears that she had now in her hands the means of rescuing her son. That Mr. Maguire would cease to make his demand for his bride when he should hear the truth, was of course to be expected; but her son would not be such an idiot, such a soft fool, as to go on with his purpose when he should

learn that such a secret as this had been kept back from him. She had refused him, and taken up with this horrid, greasy, evil-eyed parson when she was rich; and then, when she was poor,—even before she had got rid of her other engagement, she had come back upon him, and, playing upon his pity, had secured him in her toils. Lady Ball felt well inclined to thank the clergyman for coming to her relief at such a moment.

"It will be best that I should ask my niece to come down to you," said she, getting up and walking out of the room.

But she did not go up to her niece. She first went to Sir John and quieted his impatience with reference to the driving, and then, after a few minutes' further delay for consideration, she sent the servant up to her niece. Having done this she returned to the drawing-room, and found Mr. Maguire looking at the photographs on the table.

"It is very like dear Margaret, very like her, indeed," said he, looking at one of Miss Mackenzie. "The sweetest face that ever my eyes rested on! May I ask you if you have just seen your niece, Lady Ball?"

"No, sir, I have not seen her; but I have sent for her."

There was still some little delay before Margaret came down. She was much fluttered, and wanted time to think, if only time could be allowed

to her. Perhaps there had come a man to say that her money was not gone. If so, with what delight would she give it all to her cousin John! That was her first thought. But if so, how then about the promise made to her dying brother? She almost wished that the money might not be hers. Looking to herself only, and to her own happiness, it would certainly be better for her that it should not be hers. And if it should be Mr. Rubb with the yellow gloves! But before she could consider that alternative she had opened the door, and there was Mr. Maguire standing ready to receive her.

"Dearest Margaret," he exclaimed. "My own love!" And there he stood, with his arms open, as though he expected Miss Mackenzie to rush into them. He was certainly a man of very great courage.

"Mr. Maguire!" said she, and she stood still near the door. Then she looked at her aunt, and saw that Lady Ball's eyes were keenly fixed upon her. Something like the truth, some approximation to the facts as they were, flashed upon her in a moment, and she knew that she had to bear herself in this difficulty with all her discretion and all her fortitude.

"Margaret," exclaimed Mr. Maguire, "will you not come to me?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Maguire?" said she,

still standing aloof from him, and retreating somewhat nearer to the door.

"The gentleman says that you are engaged to marry him," said Lady Ball.

Margaret, looking again into her aunt's face, saw the smile of triumph that sat there, and resolved at once to make good her ground.

"If he has said that, he has told an untruth,—an untruth both unmanly and unmannerly. You hear, sir, what Lady Ball has stated. Is it true that you have made such an assertion?"

"And will you contradict it, Margaret? Oh, Margaret! Margaret! you cannot contradict it."

The reader must remember that this clergyman no doubt thought and felt that he had a good deal of truth on his side. Gentlemen when they make offers to ladies, and are told by ladies that they may come again, and that time is required for consideration, are always disposed to think that the difficulties of the siege are over. And in nine cases out of ten it is so. Mr. Maguire, no doubt, since the interview in question, had received letters from the lady which should at any rate have prevented him from uttering any such assertion as that which he had now made; but he looked upon those letters as the work of the enemy, and chose to go back for his authority to the last words which Margaret had spoken to him. He knew that he was playing an intricate

game;—that all was not quite on the square; but he thought that the enemy was playing him false, and that falsehood in return was therefore fair. This that was going on was a robbery of the Church, a spoiling of Israel, a touching with profane hands of things that had already been made sacred.

"But I do contradict it," said Margaret, stepping forward into the room, and almost exciting admiration in Lady Ball's breast by her demeanour. "Aunt," said she, "as this gentleman has chosen to come here with such a story as this, I must tell you all the facts."

"Has he ever been engaged to you?" asked Lady Ball.

"Never."

"Oh, Margaret!" again exclaimed Mr. Maguire.

"Sir, I will ask you to let me tell my aunt the truth. When I was at Littlebath, before I knew that my fortune was not my own;"—as she said this she looked hard into Mr. Maguire's face,—"before I had become penniless, as I am now;"—then she paused again, and still looking at him, saw with inward pleasure the elongation of her suitor's face, "this gentleman asked me to marry him."

"He did ask you?" said Lady Ball.

"Of course I asked her," urged Mr. Ma-

guire. "There can be no denying that on either side."

He did not now quite know what to do. He certainly did not wish to impoverish the Church by marrying Miss Mackenzie without any fortune. But might it not all be a trick? That she had been rich he knew, and how could she have become poor so quickly?

"He did ask me, and I told him that I must take a fortnight to consider of it."

"You did not refuse him, then?" said Lady Ball.

"Not then, but I have done so since by letter. Twice I have written to him, telling him that I had nothing of my own, and that there could be nothing between us."

"I got her letters," said Mr. Maguire, turning round to Lady Ball. "I certainly got her letters. But such letters as those, if they are written under dictation——"

He was rather anxious that Lady Ball should quarrel with him. In the programme which he had made for himself when he came to the house, a quarrel to the knife with the Ball family was a part of his tactics. His programme, no doubt, was disturbed by the course which events had taken, but still a quarrel with Lady Ball might be the best for him. If she were to quarrel with him, it would give him some evidence that this

story about the loss of the money was untrue. But Lady Ball would not quarrel with him. She sat still and said nothing.

"Nobody dictated them," said Margaret. "But now you are here, I will tell you the facts. The money which I thought was mine, in truth belongs to my cousin, Mr. John Ball, and I——"

So far she spoke loudly, with her face raised, and her eyes fixed upon him. Then as she concluded, she dropped her voice and eyes together. "And I am now engaged to him as his wife."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Maguire.

"That statement must be taken for what it is worth," said Lady Ball, rising from her seat. "Of what Miss Mackenzie says now, I know nothing. I sincerely hope that she may find that she is mistaken."

"And now, Margaret," said Mr. Maguire, "may I ask to see you for one minute alone?"

"Certainly not," said she. "If you have anything more to say I will hear it in my aunt's presence." She waited a few moments, but as he did not speak, she took herself back to the door and made her escape to her own room.

How Mr. Maguire took himself out of the house we need not stop to inquire. There must, I should think, have been some difficulty in the

manœuvre. It was considerably past three when Sir John was taken out for his drive, and while he was in the carriage his wife told him what had occurred.

CHAPTER VII.

STILL AT THE CEDARS.

Margaret, when she had reached her own room, and seated herself so that she could consider all that had occurred in quietness, immediately knew her own difficulty. Of course Lady Ball would give her account of what had occurred to her son, and of course John would be angry when he learned that there had been any purpose of marriage between her and Mr. Maguire. She herself took a different view of the matter now than that which had hitherto presented itself. She had not thought much of Mr. Maguire or his proposal. It had been made under a state of things differing much from that now existing, and the change that had come upon her affairs had seemed to her to annul the offer. She had learned to regard it almost as though it had never been. There had been no engagement; there had hardly been a purpose in her own mind; and the moment had never come in which

she could have spoken of it to her cousin with propriety.

That last, in truth, was her valid excuse for not having told him the whole story. She had hardly been with him long enough to do more than accept the offer he had himself made. Of course she would have told him of Mr. Maguire ;— of Mr. Maguire and of Mr. Rubb also, when first an opportunity might come for her to do so. She had no desire to keep from his knowledge any tittle of what had occurred. There had been nothing of which she was ashamed. But not the less did she feel that it would have been well for her that she should have told her own story before that horrid man had come to the Cedars. The story would now first be told to him by her aunt, and she knew well the tone in which it would be told.

It occurred to her that she might even yet go and meet him at the station. But if so, she must tell him at once, and he would know that she had done so because she was afraid of her aunt, and she disliked the idea of excusing herself before she was accused. If he really loved her, he would listen to her, and believe her. If he did not,—why then let Lady Ball have her own way. She had promised to be firm, and she would keep her promise; but she would not intrigue with the hope of making him firm. If he

was infirm of purpose, let him go. So she sat in her room, even when she heard the door close after his entrance, and did not go down till it was time for her to show herself in the drawing-room before dinner. When she entered the room was full. He nodded at her with a pleasant smile, and she made up her mind that he had heard nothing as yet. Her uncle had excused himself from coming to table, and her aunt and John were talking together in apparent eagerness about him. For one moment her cousin spoke to her before dinner.

"I am afraid," he said, "that my father is sinking fast."

Then she felt quite sure that he had as yet heard nothing about Mr. Maguire.

But it was late in the evening, when other people had gone to bed, that Lady Ball was in the habit of discussing family affairs with her son, and doubtless she would do so to-night. Margaret, before she went up to her room, strove hard to get from him a few words of kindness, but it seemed as though he was not thinking of her.

"He is full of his father," she said to herself.

When her bed-candle was in her hand she did make an opportunity to speak to him.

"Has Mr. Slow settled anything more as yet?" she asked.

"Well, yes. Not that he has settled anything,

but he has made a proposition to which I am willing to agree. I don't go up to town to-morrow, and we will talk it over. If you will agree to it, all the money difficulties will be settled."

"I will agree to anything that you tell me is right."

"I will explain it all to you to-morrow; and, Margaret, I have told Mr. Slow what are my intentions;—our intentions, I ought to say." She smiled at him with that sweet smile of hers, as though she thanked him for speaking of himself and her together, and then she took herself away. Surely, after speaking to her in that way, he would not allow any words from his mother to dissuade him from his purpose?

She could not go to bed. She knew that her fate was being discussed, and she knew that her aunt at that very time was using every argument in her power to ruin her. She felt, moreover, that the story might be told in such a way as to be terribly prejudicial to her. And now, when his father was so ill, might it not be very natural that he should do almost anything to lessen his mother's troubles? But to her it would be absolute ruin; such ruin that nothing which she had yet endured would be in any way like it. The story of the loss of her money had stunned her, but it had not broken her spirit. Her misery from that

had arisen chiefly from the wants of her brother's family. But if he were now to tell her that all must be over between them, her very heart would be broken.

She could not go to bed while this was going on, so she sat listening, till she should hear the noise of feet about the house. Silently she loosened the lock of her own door, so that the sound might more certainly come to her, and she sat thinking what she might best do. It had not been quite eleven when she came up-stairs, and at twelve she did not hear anything. And yet she was almost sure that they must be still together in that small room down-stairs, talking of her and of her conduct. It was past one before she heard the door of the room opened. She heard it so plainly, that she wondered at herself for having supposed for a moment that they could have gone without her noticing them. Then she heard her cousin's heavy step coming up-stairs. In passing to his room he would not go actually by her door, but would be very near it. She looked through the chink, having carefully put away her own candle, and could see his face as he came upon the top stair. It wore a look of trouble and of pain, but not, as she thought, of anger. Her aunt, she knew, would go to her room by the back stairs, and would go through the kitchen and over the whole of the lower house, before she would come

out on the landing to which Margaret's room opened. Then, seeing her cousin, the idea occurred to her, that she would have it all over on that very night. If he had heard that which changed his purpose, why should she be left in suspense? He should tell her at once, and at once she would prepare herself for her future life.

So she opened the door a little way, and called to him.

"John," she said, "is that you?"

She spoke almost in a whisper, but, nevertheless, he heard her very clearly, and at once turned towards her room.

"Come in, John," she said, opening the door wider. "I wish to speak to you. I have been waiting till you should come up."

She had taken off her dress, and had put on in place of it a white dressing-gown; but of this she had not thought till he was already within the room. "I hope you won't mind finding me like this, but I did so want to speak to you to-night."

He, as he looked at her, felt that he had no objection to make to her appearance. If that had been his only trouble concerning her, he would have been well satisfied. When he was within the room, she closed the lock of the door very softly, and then began to question him.

"Tell me," she said, "what my aunt has been

saying to you about that man that came here to-day."

He did not answer her at once, but stood leaning against the bed.

"I know she has been telling you," continued Margaret. "I know she would not let you go to bed without accusing me. Tell me, John, what she has told you."

He was very slow to speak. As he had sat listening to his mother's energetic accusation against the woman he had promised to marry, hearing her bring up argument after argument to prove that Margaret had, in fact, been engaged to that clergyman,—that she had intended to marry that man while she had money, and had not, up to that day, made him fully understand that she would not do so;—he had himself said little or nothing, claiming to himself the use of that night for consideration. The circumstances against Margaret he owned to be very strong. He felt angry with her for having had any lover at Littlebath. It was but the other day, during her winter visit to the Cedars, that he had himself proposed to her, and that she had rejected him. He had now renewed his proposal, and he did not like to think that there had been any one else between his overtures. And he could not deny the strength of his mother's argument when she averred that Mr. Maguire would not have come

down there unless he had had, as she said, every encouragement. Indeed, throughout the whole affair, Lady Ball believed Mr. Maguire, and disbelieved her niece; and something of her belief, and something also of her disbelief, communicated itself to her son. But, still, he reserved to himself the right of postponing his own opinion till the morrow; and as he was coming up-stairs, when Margaret saw him through the chink of the door, he was thinking of her smiles, of her graciousness, and her goodness. He was remembering the touch of her hand when they were together in the square, and the feminine sweetness with which she had yielded to him every point regarding her fortune. When he did not speak to her at once, she questioned him again.

"I know she has told you that Mr. Maguire has been here, and that she has accused me of deceiving you."

"Yes, Margaret, she has."

"And what have you said in return;—or rather, what have you thought?"

He had been leaning, or half sitting, on the bed, and she had placed herself beside him. How was it that she had again taken him by the coat, and again looked up into his face with those soft, trusting eyes? Was it a trick with her? Had she ever taken that other man by the coat in the same way, and smitten him also with the battery

of her eyes? The loose sleeve of her dressing-gown had fallen back, and he could see that her arm was round and white, and very fair. Was she conversant with such tricks as these? His mother had called her clever and cunning as a serpent. Was it so? Had his mother seen with eyes clearer than his own, and was he now being surrounded by the meshes of a false woman's web? He moved away from her quickly, and stood upon the hearth-rug with his back to the empty fire grate.

Then she stood up also.

"John," she said, "if you have condemned me, say so. I shall defend myself for the sake of my character, but I shall not ask you to come back to me."

But he had not condemned her. He had not condemned her altogether, neither had he acquitted her. He was willing enough to hear her defence, as he had heard his mother's accusation; but he was desirous of hearing it without committing himself to any opinion.

"I have been much surprised," he said, "by what my mother has now told me;—very much surprised indeed. If Mr. Maguire had any claim upon your hand, should you not have told me?"

"He had no claim; but no doubt it was right that I should tell you. I was bound

by my duty to tell you everything that had occurred."

"Of course you were,—and yet you did not do it."

"But I was not so bound before what you said to me in the shrubbery last night? Remember, John, it was but last night. Have I had a moment to speak to you?"

"If there was any question of an engagement between you and him, you should have told it me then, on the instant."

"But there was no question. He came to me one day, and made me an offer. I will tell you everything, and I think you will believe me. I found him holding a position of respect, at Littlebath, and I was all alone in the world. Why should I not listen to him? I gave him no answer, but told him to speak to me again after a while. Then came my poor brother's illness and death; and after that came, as you know, the loss of all my money. In the mean time Mr. Maguire had written, but as I knew that my brother's family must trust to me for their support,—that at least, John, was my hope then,—I answered him that my means were not the same as before, and that everything must be over. Then he wrote to me again, after I had lost my money, and once I answered him. I wrote to him so that he should know that nothing could

come of it. Here are all his letters, and I have a copy of the last I wrote to him." So saying, she pulled the papers out of his desk,—the desk in which still lay the torn shreds of her poetry,—and handed them to him. "After that, what right had he to come here and make such a statement as he did to my aunt? How can he be a gentleman, and say what was so false?"

"No one says that he is a gentleman," replied John Ball, as he took the proffered papers.

"I have told you all now," said she; and as she spoke a gleam of anger flashed from her eyes, for she was not in all respects a Griselda such as she of old. "I have told you all now, and if further excuse be wanting, I have none further to make."

Slowly he read the letters, still standing up on the hearth-rug, and then he folded them again into their shapes, and slowly gave them back to her.

"There is no doubt," said he, "as to his being a blackguard. He was hunting for your money, and now that he knows you have got none, he will trouble you no further." Then he made a move from the place on which he stood, as if he were going.

"And is that to be all, John?" she said.

"I shall see you to-morrow," he replied; "I am not going to town."

"But is that to be all to-night?"

"It is very late," and he looked at his watch; "I do not see that any good can come of talking more about it now. Good-night to you."

"Good night," she said.

Then she waited till the door was closed, and when he was gone she threw herself upon the bed. Alas! alas! Now once more was she ruined, and her present ruin was ruin indeed.

She threw herself on the bed, and sobbed as though she would have broken her heart in the bitterness of her spirit. She had told him the plainest, simplest, truest story, and he had received it without one word of commen in her favour,—without one sign to show that her truthfulness had been acknowledged by him! He had told her that this man, who had done her so great an injury, was a blackguard; but of her own conduct he had not allowed himself to speak. She knew that his judgment had gone against her, and though she felt it to be hard,—very hard,—she resolved that she would make no protest against it. Of course she would leave the Cedars. Only a few hours since she had assured herself that it was her duty henceforward to obey him in everything. But that was now all changed. Whatever he might say to the contrary, she would go. If he chose to follow her whither she went, and again ask her to be his wife, she would receive

him with open arms. Oh, yes; let him only once again own that she was worthy of him, and then she would sit at his feet and confess her folly, and ask his pardon a thousand times for the trouble she had given him. But unless he were to do this she would never again beg for favour. She had made her defence, and had, as she felt, made it in vain. She would not condescend to say one other word in excuse of her conduct.

As for her aunt, all terms between Lady Ball and herself must be at an end. Lady Ball had passed a day with her in the house without speaking to her, except when that man had come, and then she had taken part with him! Her aunt, she thought, had been untrue to hospitality in not defending the guest within her own walls; she had been untrue to her own blood in not defending her husband's niece; but, worse than all that, ten times worse, she had been untrue as from one woman to another! Margaret, as she thought of this rose from the bed and walked wildly through the room unlike any Griselda. No; she would have no terms with Lady Ball. Lady Ball had understood it all, though John had not done so! She had known how it all was, and had pretended not to know! Because she had an object of her own to gain, she had allowed these calumnies to be believed! Let come what might, they should all know that Margaret Mackenzie, poor, wretched,

destitute as she was, had still spirit enough to resent such injuries as these.

In the morning she sent down word by one of her young cousins that she would not come to breakfast, and she asked that some tea might be sent up to her.

"Is she in bed, my dear?" asked Lady Ball.

"No, she is not in bed," said Jane Ball. "She is sitting up, and has got all her things about the room as though she were packing."

"What nonsense!" said Lady Ball; "why does she not come down?"

Then Isabella, the eldest girl, was sent up to her, but Margaret refused to show herself.

"She says she would rather not; but she wants to know if papa will walk out with her at ten."

Lady Ball again said that this was nonsense, but tea and toast were at last supplied to her, and her cousin promised to be ready at the hour named. Exactly at ten o'clock Margaret opened the schoolroom door, and asked one of the girls to tell her father that she would be found on the walk leading to the long shrubbery.

There on the walk she remained, walking slowly backwards and forwards over a space of twenty yards, till he joined her. She gave him her hand and then turned towards the long shrubbery, and he, following her direction, walked at her side.

"John," she said, "you will not be surprised at my telling you that, after what has occurred, I shall leave this place to-day."

"You must not do that," he said.

"Ah, but I must do it. There are some things, John, which no woman should bear or need bear. After what has occurred it is not right that I should incur your mother's displeasure any longer. All my things are ready. I want you to have them taken down to the one o'clock train."

"No, Margaret; I will not consent to that."

"But, John, I cannot consent to anything else. Yesterday was a terrible day for me. I don't think you can know how terrible. What I endured then no one has a right to expect that I should endure any longer. It was necessary that I should say something to you of what had occurred, and that I said last night. I have no further call to remain here, and, most positively, I shall go to-day."

He looked into her face and saw that she was resolved, but yet he was not minded to give way. He did not like to think that all authority over her was passing out of his hands. During the night he had not made up his mind to pardon her at once. Nay, he had not yet told himself that he would pardon her at all. But he was prepared to receive her tears and excuses, and we may say

that, in all probability, he would have pardoned her had she wept before him and excused herself. But though she could shed tears on this matter,—though, doubtless, there were many tears to be shed by her,—she would shed no more before him in token of submission. If he would first submit, then, indeed, she might weep on his shoulder or laugh on his breast as his mood might dictate.

"Margaret," he said, "we have very much to talk over before you can go."

"There will be time for that between this and one. Look here, John; I have made up my mind to go. After what took place yesterday, it will be better for us all that we should be apart."

"I don't see that, unless, indeed, you are determined to quarrel with us altogether. I suppose my wishes in the matter will count for something."

"Yesterday morning they would have counted for everything; but not this morning."

"And why not, Margaret?"

This was a question to which it was so difficult to find a reply, that she left it unanswered. They both walked on in silence for some paces, and then she spoke again.

"You said yesterday that you had been with Mr. Slow, and that you had something to tell me.

If you still wish to tell me anything, perhaps you can do so now."

"Everything seems to be so much changed," said he, speaking very gloomily.

"Yes," said she; "things are changed. But my confidence in Mr. Slow, and in you, is not altered. If you like it, you can settle everything about the money without consulting me. I shall agree to anything about that."

"I was going to propose that your brother's family should have the debt due by the Rubbs. Mr. Slow thinks he might so manage as to secure the payment of the interest."

"Very well; I shall be delighted that it should be so. I had hoped that they would have had more, but that of course is all over. I cannot give them what is not mine."

But this arrangement, which would have been pleasant enough before,—which seemed to be very pleasant when John Ball was last in Mr. Slow's chambers, telling that gentleman that he was going to make everything smooth by marrying his cousin,—was not by any means so pleasant now. He had felt, when he was mentioning the proposed arrangement to Margaret, that the very naming of it seemed to imply that Mr. Maguire and his visit were to go for nothing. If Mr. Maguire and his visit were to go for much, —to go for all that which Lady Ball wished to

make of them,—then, in such a case as that, the friendly arrangement in question would not hold water. If that were to be so, they must all go to work again, and Mr. Slow must be told to do the best in his power for his own client. John Ball was by no means resolved to obey his mother implicitly and make so much of Mr. Maguire and his visit as all this; but how could he help doing so if Margaret would go away? He could not as yet bring himself to tell her that Mr. Maguire and the visit should go altogether for nothing. He shook his head in his trouble, and pished and pshawed.

"The truth is, Margaret, you can't go to-day."

"Indeed I shall, John," said she, smiling. "You would hardly wish to keep me a prisoner, and the worst you could do would be to keep my luggage from me."

"Then I must say that you are very obstinate."

"It is not very often that I resolve to have my own way; but I have resolved now, and you should not try to baulk me."

They had now come round nearly to the house, and she showed, by the direction that she took, that she was going in.

"You will go?" said he.

"Yes," said she; "I will go. My address will be at the old house in Arundel Street. Shall I see you again before I go?" she asked him, when

she stood on the door-step. "Perhaps you will be busy, and I had better say good-bye."

"Good-bye," said he, very gloomily; but he took her hand.

"I suppose I had better not disturb my uncle. You will give him my love. And, John, you will tell some one about my luggage; will you not?"

He muttered some affirmative, and then went round from the front of the house, while she entered the hall.

It was now half-past eleven, and she intended to start at half-past twelve. She went into the drawing-room, and not finding her aunt, rang the bell. Lady Ball was with Sir John, she was told. She then wrote a note on a scrap of paper, and sent it in:

"Dear Aunt,—I leave here at half-past twelve. Perhaps you would like to see me before I go.

"M. M."

Then, while she was waiting for an answer, she went into the school-room, and said good-bye to all the children.

"But you are coming back, aunt Meg," said the youngest girl.

Margaret stooped down to kiss her, and, when the child saw and felt the tears, she asked no further questions.

"Lady Ball is in the drawing-room, Miss," a servant said at that moment, and there she went to fight her last battle!

"What's the meaning of this, Margaret?" said her aunt.

"Simply that I am going. I was to have gone on Monday, as you will remember."

"But it was understood that you were to stop."

For a moment or two Margaret said nothing.

"I hate these sudden changes," said Lady Ball; "they are hardly respectable. I don't think you should leave the house in this way, without having given notice to any one. What will the servants think of it?"

"They will probably think the truth, aunt. They probably thought that, when they saw that you did not speak to me yesterday morning. You can hardly imagine that I should stay in the house under such circumstances as that."

"You must do as you like, of course."

"In this instance, I must, aunt. I suppose I cannot see my uncle?"

"It is quite out of the question."

"Then I will say good-bye to you. I have said good-bye to John. Good-bye, aunt," and Margaret put out her hand.

But Lady Ball did not put out hers.

"Good-bye, Margaret," she said. 'There are

circumstances under which it is impossible for a person to make any expression of feeling that may be taken for approbation. I hope a time may come when these things shall have passed away, and that I may be able to see you again."

Margaret's eyes, as she made her way out of the room, were full of tears, and when she found herself outside the hall door, and at the bottom of the steps, she was obliged to put her handkerchief up to them. Before her on the road was a boy with a donkey cart and her luggage. She looked round furtively, half fearing, half hoping,—hardly expecting, but yet thinking, that she might again see her cousin. But he did not show himself to her as she walked down to the railway station by herself. As she went she told herself that she was right; she applauded her own courage; but what, oh! what was she to do? Everything now was over for her. Her fortune was gone. The man whom she had learned to love had left her. There was no place in the world on which her feet might rest till she had made one for herself by the work of her hands. And as for friends;—was there a single being in the world whom she could now call her friend?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LODGINGS OF MRS. BUGGINS, NEÉ PROTHEROE.

It was nearly the end of October when Miss Mackenzie left the Cedars, and at that time of the year there is not much difficulty in getting lodgings in London. The house which her brother Walter occupied in Arundel Street, had at his death remained in the hands of an old servant of his, who had bought her late master's furniture with her savings, and had continued to live there, letting out the house in lodgings. Her former mistress had gone to see her once or twice during the past year, and it had been understood between them, that if Miss Mackenzie ever wanted a room for a night or two in London, she could be accommodated at the old house. She would have preferred to write to Hannah Protheroe,—or Mrs. Protheroe, as she was now called by brevet rank since she had held a house of her own,—had time permitted her to do so. But time and the circumstances did not permit this, and therefore

she had herself driven to Arundel Street without any notice.

Mrs. Protheroe received her with open arms, and with many promises of comfort and attendance,—as was to be expected, seeing that Mrs. Protheroe was, as she thought, receiving into her house the rich heiress. She proffered at once the use of her drawing-room and of the best bedroom, and declared that as the house was now empty, with the exception of one young gentleman from Somerset House up-stairs, she would be able to devote herself almost exclusively to Miss Mackenzie. Things were much changed from those former days in which Hannah Protheroe used frequently to snub Margaret Mackenzie, being almost of equal standing in the house with her young mistress. And now Margaret was called upon to explain, that low as her standing might have been then, at this present moment it was even lower. She had indeed the means of paying for her lodgings, but these she was called upon to husband with the minutest economy. The task of telling all this was difficult. She began it by declining the drawing-room, and by saying that a bedroom up-stairs would suffice for her.

"You haven't heard, Hannah, what has happened to me," she said, when Mrs. Protheroe expressed her surprise at this decision. "My

brother's will was no will at all. I do not get any of his property. It all goes under some other will to my cousin, Mr. John Ball."

By these tidings Hannah was of course prostrated, and driven into a state of excitement that was not without its pleasantness as far as she was concerned. Of course she objected that the last will must be the real will, and in this way the matter came to full discussion between them.

"And, after all, that John Ball is to have everything!" said Mrs. Protheroe, holding up both her hands.

By this time Hannah Protheroe had got herself comfortably into a chair, and no doubt her personal pleasure in the evening's occupation was considerably enhanced by the unconscious feeling that she was the richer woman of the two. But she behaved very well, and I am inclined to think, in preparing buttered muffins for her guest, she was more particular in the toasting, and more generous with the butter, than she would have been had she been preparing the dainty for drawing-room use. And when she learned that Margaret had eaten nothing since breakfast, she herself went out and brought in a sweetbread with her own hand, though she kept a servant whom she might have sent to the shop. And, for the honour of lodging-house keepers, I protest

that that sweetbread never made its appearance in any bill.

"You will be more comfortable down here with me, won't you, my dear, than up there, with not a creature to speak to?"

In this way Mrs. Protheroe made her apology for giving Miss Mackenzie her tea down-stairs, in a little back parlour behind the kitchen. It was a tidy room, with two wooden arm-chairs, and a bit of carpet over the flags in the centre, and a rug before the fire. Margaret did not inquire why it smelt of tobacco, nor did Mrs. Protheroe think it necessary to give any explanation why she went up herself at half-past seven to answer the bell at the area; nor did she say anything then of the office messenger from Somerset House, who often found this little room convenient for his evening pipe. So was passed the first evening after our Griselda had left the Cedars.

The next day she sat at home doing nothing, —still talking to Hannah Protheroe, and thinking that perhaps John Ball might come. But he did not come. She dined down-stairs, at one o'clock, in the same room behind the kitchen, and then she had tea at six. But as Hannah intimated that perhaps a gentleman friend would look in during the evening, she was obliged to betake herself, after tea, to the solitude of her own room. As Hannah was between fifty and sixty, and

nearer the latter age than the former, there could be no objection to her receiving what visitors she pleased. The third day passed with Miss Mackenzie the same as the second, and still no cousin came to see her. The next day, being Sunday, she diversified by going to church three times; but on the Sunday she was forced to dine alone, as the gentleman friend usually came in on that day to eat his bit of mutton with his friend, Mrs. Protheroe.

"A most respectable man, in the Admiralty branch, Miss Margaret, and will have a pension of twenty-seven shillings and sixpence a week in a year or two. And it is so lonely by oneself, you know."

Then Miss Mackenzie knew that Hannah Protheroe intended to become Hannah Buggins, and she understood the whole mystery of the tobacco smoke.

On the Monday she went to the house in Gower Street, and communicated to them the fact that she had left the Cedars. Miss Colza was in the room with her sister-in-law and nieces, and as it was soon evident that Miss Colza knew the whole history of her misfortune with reference to the property, she talked about her affairs before Miss Colza as though that young lady had been one of her late brother's family. But yet she felt that she did not like Miss Colza, and once or twice

felt almost inclined to resent certain pushing questions which Miss Colza addressed to her.

"And have you quarrelled with all the Ball family?" the young lady asked, putting great emphasis on the word all.

"I did not say that I had quarrelled with any of them," said Miss Mackenzie.

"Oh! I beg pardon. I thought as you came away so sudden like, and as you didn't see any of them since, you know——"

"It is a matter of no importance whatever," said Miss Mackenzie.

"No; none in the least," said Miss Colza. And in this way they made up their minds to hate each other.

But what did the woman mean by talking in this way of all the Balls, as though a quarrel with one of the family was a thing of more importance than a quarrel with any of the others? Could she know, or could she even guess, anything of John Ball and of the offer he had made? But this mystery was soon cleared up in Margaret's mind, when, at Mrs. Mackenzie's request, they two went up-stairs into that lady's bed-room for a little private conversation.

The conversation was desired for purposes appertaining solely to the convenience of the widow. She wanted some money, and then, with tears in her eyes, she demanded to know what

was to be done. Miss Colza paid her eighteen shillings a week for board and lodging, and that was now two weeks in arrear; and one bedroom was let to a young man employed in the oilcloth factory, at seven shillings a week.

"And the rent is ninety pounds, and the taxes twenty-two," said Mrs. Mackenzie, with her handkerchief up to her eyes; "and there's the taxman come now for seven pound ten, and where I'm to get it unless I coined my blood I don't know."

Margaret gave her two sovereigns which she had in her purse, and promised to send her a cheque for the amount of the taxes due. Then she told as much as she could tell of that proposal as to the interest of the money due from the firm in the New Road.

"If it could only be made certain," said the widow, who had fallen much from her high ideas since Margaret had last seen her. Things were greatly changed in that house since the day on which the dinner, à la Russe, had been given under the auspices of Mr. Grandairs. "If it can only be made certain. They still keep his name up in the firm. There it is as plain as life over the place of business,"—she would not even yet call it a shop,—"Rubb and Mackenzie; and yet they won't let me know anything as to how matters are going on. I went there the other

day, and they would tell me nothing. And as for Samuel Rubb, he hasn't been here this last fortnight, and I've got no one to see me righted. If you were to ask Mr. Slow, wouldn't he be able to see me righted?"

Margaret declared that she hardly knew whether that would come within Mr. Slow's line of business, and that she did not feel herself competent to give advice on such a point as that. She then explained, as best she could, that her own affairs were not as yet settled, but that she was led to hope, from what had been said to her, that the interest due by the firm on the money borrowed might become a fixed annual income for Mrs. Mackenzie's benefit.

After that it came out that Mr. Maguire had again been in Gower Street.

"And he was alone, for the best part of half an hour, with that young woman down-stairs," said Mrs. Mackenzie.

"And you saw him?" Margaret asked.

"Oh, yes; I saw him afterwards."

"And what did he say?"

"He didn't say much to me. Only he gave me to understand,—at least, that is what I suppose to he meant,—that you and he——. He meant to say, that you and he had been courting, I suppose."

Then Margaret understood why Miss Colza had desired to know whether she had quarrelled

with all the Balls. In her open and somewhat indignant speech in the drawing-room at the Cedars, she had declared before Mr. Maguire, in her aunt's presence, that she was engaged to marry her cousin, John Ball. Mr. Maguire had now enlisted Miss Colza in his service, and had told Miss Colza what had occurred. But still Miss Mackenzie did not thoroughly understand the matter. Why, she asked herself, should Mr. Maguire trouble himself further, now that he knew that she had no fortune? But, in truth, it was not so easy to satisfy Mr. Maguire on that point, as it was to satisfy Miss Mackenzie herself. He believed that the relatives of his lady-love were robbing her, or that they were, at any rate, taking advantage of her weakness. If it might be given to him to rescue her and her fortune from them, then, in such case as that, surely he would get his reward. The reader will therefore understand why Miss Colza was anxious to know whether Miss Mackenzie had quarrelled with all the Balls.

Margaret's face became unusually black when she was told that she and Mr. Maguire had been courting, but she did not contradict the assertion. She did, however, express her opinion of that gentleman.

"He is a mean, false, greedy man," she said, and then paused a moment; "and he has been

the cause of my ruin." She would not, however, explain what she meant by this, and left the house, without going back to the room in which Miss Colza was sitting.

About a week afterwards she got a letter from Mr. Slow, in which that gentleman,—or rather the firm, for the letter was signed Slow and Bidea-while,—asked her whether she was in want of immediate funds. The affair between her and her cousin was not yet, they said, in a state for final settlement, but they would be justified in supplying her own immediate wants out of the estate. To this she sent a reply, saying that she had money for her immediate wants, but that she would feel very grateful if anything could be done for Mrs. Mackenzie and her family. Then she got a further letter, very short, saying that a half-year's interest on the loan had, by Mr. Ball's consent, been paid to Mrs. Mackenzie by Rubb and Mackenzie.

On the day following this, when she was sitting up in her bed-room, Mrs. Protheroe came to her, dressed in wonderful habiliments. She wore a dark-blue bonnet, filled all round with yellow flowers, and a spotted silk dress, of which the prevailing colour was scarlet. She was going, she said, to St. Mary-le-Strand, "to be made Mrs. Buggins of." She tried to carry it off with bravado when she entered the room, but she left

it with a tear in her eye, and a whimper in her throat. "To be sure, I'm an old woman," she said before she went. "Who has said that I ain't? Not I; nor yet Buggins. We is both of us old. But I don't know why we is to be desolate and lonely all our days, because we ain't young. It seems to me that the young folks is to have it all to themselves, and I'm sure I don't know why." Then she went, clearly resolved, that as far as she was concerned, the young people shouldn't have it all to themselves; and as Buggins was of the same way of thinking, they were married at St. Mary-le-Strand that very morning.

And this marriage would have been of no moment to us or to our little history, had not Mr. Maguire chosen that morning, of all mornings in the year, to call on Miss Mackenzie in Arundel Street. He had obtained her address, —of course, from Miss Colza; and, not having been idle the while in pushing his inquiries respecting Miss Mackenzie's affairs, had now come to Arundel Street to carry on the battle as best he might. Margaret was still in her room as he came, and as the girl could not show the gentleman up there, she took him into an empty parlour, and brought the tidings up to the lodger. Mr. Maguire had not sent up his name; but a personal description by the girl at once made Margaret know who was there.

"I won't see him," said she, with heightened colour, grieving greatly that the strong-minded Hannah Protheroe,—or, Buggins, as it might probably be by that time,—was not at home. "Martha, don't let him come up. Tell him to go away at once."

After some persuasion, the girl went down with the message, which she softened to suit her own idea of propriety. But she returned, saying that the gentleman was very urgent. He insisted that he must see Miss Mackenzie, if only for an instant, before he left the house.

"Tell him," said Margaret, "that nothing shall induce me to see him. I'll send for a policeman. If he won't go when he's told, Martha, you must go for a policeman."

Martha, when she heard that, became frightened about the spoons and coats, and ran down again in a hurry. Then she came up again with a scrap of paper, on which a few words had been written with a pencil. This was passed through a very narrow opening in the door, as Margaret stood with it guarded, fearing lest the enemy might carry the point by an assault.

"You are being robbed," said the note, "you are, indeed; and my only wish is to protect you."

"Tell him that there is no answer, and that I will receive no more notes from him," said Mar-

garet. Then, at last, when he received that message, Mr. Maguire went away.

About a week after that, another visitor came to Miss Mackenzie, and him she received. But he was not the man for whose coming she in truth longed. It was Mr. Samuel Rubb who now called, and when Mrs. Buggins told her lodger that he was in the parlour, she went down to see him willingly. Her life was now more desolate than it had been before the occurrence of that ceremony in the church of St. Mary-le-Strand; for, though she had much respect for Mr. Buggins, of whose character she had heard nothing that was not good, and though she had given in her consent as to the expediency of the Buggins alliance, she did not find herself qualified to associate with Mr. Buggins.

"He won't say a word, Miss," Hannah had pleaded, "and he'll run and fetch for you like a dog."

But even when recommended so highly for his social qualities, Buggins, she felt, would be antipathetic to her; and, with many false assurances that she did not think it right to interrupt a newly-married couple, she confined herself on those days to her own room.

But when Mr. Rubb came, she went down to see him. How much Mr. Rubb knew of her affairs,—how far he might be in Miss Colza's

confidence,—she did not know; but his conduct to her had not been offensive, and she had been pleased when she learned that the first half year's interest had been paid to her sister-in-law.

"I'm sorry to hear of all this, Miss Mackenzie," said he, when he came forward to greet her. He had not thought it necessary, on this occasion, to put on his yellow gloves or his shiny boots, and she liked him the better on that account.

"Of all what, Mr. Rubb?" said she.

"Why, about you and the family at the Cedars. If what I hear is true, they've just got you to give up everything, and then dropped you."

"I left Sir John Ball's house on my own account, Mr. Rubb; I was not turned out."

"I don't suppose they'd do that. They wouldn't dare to do that; not so soon after getting hold of your money. Miss Mackenzie, I hope I shall not anger you; but it seems to me to be the most horridly wicked piece of business I ever heard of."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Rubb. You forget that the thing was first found out by my own lawyer."

"I don't know how that may be, but I can't bring myself to believe that it all is as they say it is; I can't, indeed." She merely smiled, and

shook her head. Then he went on speaking. I hope I'm not giving offence. It's not what I mean, if I am."

"You are not giving any offence, Mr. Rubb; only I think you are mistaken about my relatives at Twickenham."

"Of course, I may be; there's no doubt of that. I may be mistaken, like another. But, Miss Mackenzie, by heavens, I can't bring myself to think it." As he spoke in this energetic way, he rose from his chair, and stood opposite to her. "I cannot bring myself to think that the fight should be given up."

"But there has been no fight."

"There ought to be a fight, Miss Mackenzie; I know that there ought. I believe I'm right in supposing, if all this is allowed to go by the board as it is going, that you won't have, so to say, anything of your own."

"I shall have to earn my bread like other people; and, indeed, I am endeavouring now to put myself in the way of doing so."

"I'll tell you how you shall earn it. Come and be my wife. I think we've got a turn for good up at the business. Come and be my wife. That's honest, any way."

"You are honest," said she, with a tear in her eye.

"I am honest now," said he, "though I was

not honest to you once:" and I think there was a tear in his eye also.

"If you mean about the money that you have borrowed, I am very glad of it,—very glad of it. It will be something for them in Gower Street."

"Miss Mackenzie, as long as I have a hand to help myself with, they shall have that at least. But now, about this other thing. Whether there's nothing to come or anything, I'll be true to my offer. I'll fight for it, if there's to be a fight, and I'll let it go if there's to be no fight. But whether one way or whether the other, there shall be a home for you when you say the word. Say it now. Will you be my wife?"

"I cannot say that word, Mr. Rubb."

"And why not?"

"I cannot say it; indeed, I cannot."

"Is it Mr. Ball that prevents you?"

"Do not ask me questions like that. Indeed, indeed, indeed, I cannot do as you ask me."

"You despise me, like enough, because I am only a tradesman?"

"What am I myself, that I should despise any man? No, Mr. Rubb, I am thankful and grateful to you; but it cannot be."

Then he took up his hat, and, turning away from her without any word of adieu, made his way out of the house.

"He really do seem a nice man, Miss," said Mrs. Buggins. "I wonder you wouldn't have him liefer than go into one of them hospitals."

Whether Miss Mackenzie had any remnant left of another hope, or whether all such hope had gone, we need not perhaps inquire accurately. Whatever might be the state of her mind on that score, she was doing her best to carry out her purpose with reference to the plan of nursing; and as she could not now apply to her cousin, she had written to Mr. Slow upon the subject.

Late in November yet another gentleman came to see her, but when he came she was unfortunately out. She had gone up to the house in Gower Street, and had there been so cross-questioned by the indefatigable Miss Colza that she had felt herself compelled to tell her sister-in-law that she could not again come there as long as Miss Colza was one of the family. It was manifest to her that these questions had been put on behalf of Mr. Maguire, and she had therefore felt more indignant than she would have been had they originated in the impertinent curiosity of the woman herself. She also informed Mrs. Mackenzie that, in obedience to instructions from Mr. Slow, she intended to postpone her purpose with reference to the hospital till some time early in the next year. Mr. Slow had sent a clerk to her to explain that till that time such amicable arrangement as that

to which he looked forward to make could not be completed. On her return from this visit to Gower Street she found the card,—simply the card,—of her cousin, John Ball.

Why had she gone out? Why had she not remained a fixture in the house, seeing that it had always been possible that he should come? But why! oh, why! had he treated her in this way, leaving a card at her home, as though that would comfort her in her grievous desolation? It would have been far better that he should have left there no intimation of his coming. She took the card, and in her anger threw it from her into the fire.

But yet she waited for him to come again. Not once during the next ten days, excepting on the Sunday, did she go out of the house during the hours that her cousin would be in London. Very sad and monotonous was her life, passed alone in her own bedroom. And it was the more sad, because Mrs. Buggins somewhat resented the manner in which her husband was treated. Mrs. Buggins was still attentive, but she made little speeches about Buggins' respectability, and Margaret felt that her presence in the house was an annoyance.

At last, at the end of the ten days, John Ball came again, and Margaret, with a fluttering heart, descended to meet him in the empty parlour.

She was the first to speak. As she had come down-stairs, she had made up her mind to tell him openly what were her thoughts.

"I had hoped to have seen you before this, John," she said, as she gave him her hand.

"I did call before. Did you not get my card?"

"Oh, yes; I got your card. But I had expected to see you before that. The kind of life that I am leading here is very sad, and cannot be long continued."

"I would have had you remain at the Cedars, Margaret; but you would not be counselled by me."

"No; not in that, John."

"I only mention it now to excuse myself. But you are not to suppose that I am not anxious about you, because I have not seen you. I have been with Mr. Slow constantly. These law questions are always very tedious in being settled."

"But I want nothing for myself."

"It behoves Mr. Slow, for that very reason, to be the more anxious on your behalf; and, if you will believe me, Margaret, I am quite as anxious as he is. If you had remained with us, I could have discussed the matter with you from day to day; but, of course, I cannot do so while you are here."

As he was talking in this way, everything with

reference to their past intercourse came across her mind. She could not tell him that she had been anxious to see him, not with reference to the money, but that he might tell her that he did not find her guilty on that charge which her aunt had brought against her concerning Mr. Maguire. She did not want assurances of solicitude as to her future means of maintenance. She cared little or nothing about her future maintenance, if she could not get from him one kind word with reference to the past. But he went on talking to her about Mr. Slow, and the interest, and the property, and the law, till, at last, in her anger, she told him that she did not care to hear further about it, till she should be told at last what she was to do.

"As I have got nothing of my own," she said, "I want to be earning my bread, and I think that the delay is cruel."

"And do you think," said he, "that the delay is not cruel to me also?"

She thought that he alluded to the fact that he could not yet obtain possession of the income for his own purposes.

"You may have it all at once, for me," she said.

"Have all what?" he replied. "Margaret, I think you fail to see the difficulties of my position. In the first place, my father is on his death-bed!"

"Oh, John, I am sorry for that."

"And, then, my mother is very bitter about all this. And how can I, at such a time, tell her that her opinion is to go for nothing? I am bound to think of my own children, and cannot abandon my claim to the property."

"No one wants you to abandon it. At least, I do not."

"What am I to do, then? This Mr. Maguire is making charges against me."

"Oh, John!"

"He is saying that I am robbing you, and trying to cover the robbery by marrying you. Both my own lawyer, and Mr. Slow, have told me that a plain statement of the whole case must be prepared, so that any one who cares to inquire may learn the whole truth, before I can venture to do anything which might otherwise compromise my character. You do not think of all this, Margaret, when you are angry with me."

Margaret, hanging down her head, confessed that she had not thought of it.

"The difficulty would have been less, had you remained at the Cedars."

Then she again lifted her head, and told him that that would have been impossible. Let things go as they might, she knew that she had been right in leaving her aunt's house.

There was not much more said between them,

nor did he give her any definite promise as to when he would see her again. He told her that she might draw on Mr. Slow for money if she wanted it, but that she again declined. And he told her also not to withdraw Susannah Mackenzie from her school at Littlebath,—at any rate, not for the present; and intimated also that Mr. Slow would pay the schoolmistress's bill. Then he took his leave of her. He had spoken no word of love to her; but yet she felt, when he was gone, that her case was not as hopeless now as it had seemed to be that morning.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LITTLE STORY OF THE LION AND THE LAMB.

During those three months of October, November, and December, Mr. Maguire was certainly not idle. He had, by means of pertinacious inquiry, learned a good deal about Miss Mackenzie; indeed, he had learned most of the facts which the reader knows, though not quite all of them. He had seen Jonathan Ball's will, and he had seen Walter Mackenzie's will. He had ascertained, through Miss Colza, that John Ball now claimed the property by some deed said to have been executed by Jonathan Ball previous to the execution of his will; and he had also learned, from Miss Mackenzie's own lips, in Lady Ball's presence, that she had engaged herself to marry the man who was thus claiming her property. Why should Mr. Ball want to marry her,—who would in such case be penniless,—but that he felt himself compelled in that way to quell all further

inquiry into the thing that he was doing? And why should she desire to marry him, but that in this way she might, as it were, go with her own property, and not lose the value of it herself when compelled to surrender it to her cousin? That she would have given herself, with all her property, to him—Maguire—a few months ago, Mr. Maguire felt fully convinced, and, as I have said before, had some ground for such conviction. He had learned, also, from Miss Colza, that Miss Mackenzie had certainly quarrelled with Lady Ball, and that she had, so Miss Colza believed, been turned out of the house at the Cedars. Whether Mr. Ball had or had not abandoned his matrimonial prospects, Miss Colza could not quite determine. Having made up her mind to hate Miss Mackenzie, and therefore, as was natural, thinking that no gentleman could really like such "a poor dowdy creature," she rather thought that he had abandoned his matrimonial prospects. Mr. Maguire had thus learned much on the subject; but he had not learned this,—that John Ball was honest throughout in the matter, and that the lawyers employed in it were honest also.

And now, having got together all this information, and he himself being in a somewhat precarious condition as to his own affairs, Mr. Maguire resolved upon using his information boldly. He had a not incorrect idea of the fitness of things,

and did not fail to tell himself that were he at that moment in possession of those clerical advantages which his labours in the vineyard should have earned for him, he would not have run the risk which he must undoubtedly incur by engaging himself in this matter. Had he a full church at Littlebath depending on him, had Mr. Stumfold's chance and Mr. Stumfold's success been his, had he still even been an adherent of the Stumfoldian fold, he would have paused before he rushed to the public with an account of Miss Mackenzie's grievance. But as matters stood with him, looking round upon his own horizon, he did not see that he had any course before him more likely to lead to good pecuniary results than this.

The reader has been told how Mr. Maguire went to Arundel Street, and how he was there received. But that reception did not at all daunt his courage. It showed him that the lady was still under the Ball influence, and that his ally, Miss Colza, was probably wrong in supposing that the Ball marriage was altogether off. But this only made him the more determined to undermine that influence, and to prevent that marriage. If he could once succeed in convincing the lady that her best chance of regaining her fortune lay in his assistance, or if he could even convince her that his interference must result, either with or without her good wishes, in dividing her alto-

gether from the Ball alliance, then she would be almost compelled to throw herself into his arms. That she was violently in love with him he did not suppose, nor did he think it at all more probable that she should be violently in love with her cousin. He put her down in his own mind as one of those weak, good women, who can bring themselves easily to love any man, and who are sure to make useful wives, because they understand so thoroughly the nature of obedience. If he could secure for her her fortune, and could divide her from John Ball, he had but little doubt that she would come to him, in spite of the manner in which she had refused to receive him in Arundel Street. Having considered all this, after the mode of thinking which I have attempted to describe, he went to work with such weapons as were readiest to his hands.

As a first step, he wrote boldly to John Ball. In this letter he reasserted the statement he had made to Lady Ball as to Miss Mackenzie's engagement to himself, and added some circumstances which he had not mentioned to Lady Ball. He said, that having become engaged to that lady, he had, in consequence, given up his curacy at Littlebath, and otherwise so disarranged his circumstances, as to make it imperative upon him to take the steps which he was now taking. He had come up to London, expecting to find her

anxious to receive him in Gower Street, and had then discovered that she had been taken away to the Cedars. He could not, he said, give any adequate description of his surprise, when, on arriving there, he heard from the mouth of his own Margaret that she was now engaged to her cousin. But if his surprise then had been great and terrible, how much greater and more terrible must it have been when, step by step, the story of that claim upon her fortune revealed itself to him! He pledged himself, in his letter, as a gentleman and as a Christian minister, to see the matter out. He would not allow Miss Mackenzie to be despoiled of her fortune and her hand,—both of which he had a right to regard as his own,—without making known to the public a transaction which he regarded as nefarious. Then there was a good deal of eloquent indignation, the nature and purport of which the reader will probably understand.

Mr. Ball did not at all like this letter. He had that strong feeling of disinclination to be brought before the public with reference to his private affairs, which is common to all Englishmen; and he specially had a dislike to this, seeing that there would be a question not only as to money, but also as to love. A gentleman does not like to be accused of a dishonest attempt to possess himself of a lady's property; but, at the age of fifty,

even that is almost better than one which charges him with such attempt against a lady's heart. He knew that he was not dishonest, and therefore could endure the first. He was not quite sure that he was not, or might not become, ridiculous, and therefore feared the latter very greatly. He could not ignore the letter, and there was nothing for it but to show it to his lawyer. Unfortunately, he had told this lawyer, on the very day of Mr. Maguire's visit to the Cedars, that all was to be made smooth by his marriage with Miss Mackenzie; and now, with much misery and many inward groanings, he had to explain all this story of Mr. Maguire. It was the more painful in that he had to admit that an offer had been made to the lady by the clergyman, and had not been rejected.

"You don't think there was more than that?" asked the lawyer, having paved the way for his question with sundry apologetic flourishes.

"I am sure there was not," said John Ball. "She is as true as the Gospel, and he is as false as the devil."

"Oh, yes," said the lawyer; "there's no doubt about his falsehood. He's one of those fellows for whom nothing is too dirty. Clergymen are like women. As long as they're pure, they're a long sight purer than other men; but when they fall, they sink deeper."

"You needn't be afraid of taking her word,' said John Ball. "If all women were as pure as she is, there wouldn't be much amiss with them." His eyes glittered as he spoke of her, and it was a pity that Margaret could not have heard him then, and seen him there.

"You don't think she has been,—just a little foolish, you know?"

"I think she was very foolish in not bidding such a man to go about his business at once. But she has not been more so than what she owns. She is as brave as she is good, and I don't think she would keep anything back."

The result was that a letter was written by the lawyer to Mr. Maguire, telling Mr. Maguire that any further communication should be made to him; and also making a slight suggestion as to the pains and penalties which are incurred in the matter of a libel. Mr. Maguire had dated his letter from Littlebath, and there the answer reached him. He had returned thither, having found that he could take no further immediate steps towards furthering his cause in London.

And now, what step should he take next? More than once he thought of putting his own case into the hands of a lawyer; but what was a lawyer to do for him? An action for breach of promise was open to him, but he had wit enough to feel that there was very little chance of success

for him in that line. He might instruct a lawyer to look into Miss Mackenzie's affairs, and he thought it probable that he might find a lawyer to take such instructions. But there would be much expense in this, and, probably, no result. Advancing logically from one conclusion to another, he at last resolved that he must rush boldly into print, and lay the whole iniquity of the transaction open to the public. He believed,—I think he did believe,—that the woman was being wronged. Some particle of such belief he had, and fostering himself with this, he sat himself down, and wrote a leading article.

Now there existed in Littlebath at this time a weekly periodical called the Christian Examiner, with which Mr. Maguire had for some time had dealings. He had written for the paper, taking an earnest part in local religious subjects; and the paper, in return, had very frequently spoken highly of Mr. Maguire's eloquence, and of Mr. Maguire's energy. There had been a give and take in this, which all people understand who are conversant with the provincial, or, perhaps I might add, with the metropolitan press of the country. The paper in question was not a wicked paper, nor were the gentlemen concerned in its publication intentionally scurrilous or malignant; but it was subject to those great temptations which beset all class newspapers of the kind, and

to avoid which seems to be almost more difficult, in handling religious subjects, than in handling any other. The editior of a Christian Examiner, if, as is probable, he have, of his own, very strong and one-sided religious convictions, will think that those who differ from him are in a parlous way, and so thinking, will feel himself bound to tell them so. The man who advocates one line of railway instead of another, or one prime minister as being superior to all others, does not regard his opponents as being fatally wrong,—wrong for this world and for the next,—and he can restrain himself. But how is a newspaper writer to restrain himself when his opponent is incurring everlasting punishment, or, worse still, carrying away others to a similar doom, in that they read, and perhaps even purchase, that which the lost one has written? In this way the contests of religious newspapers are apt to be personal; and heavy, biting, scorching attacks, become the natural vehicle of Christian Examiners.

Mr. Maguire sat down and wrote his leading article, which on the following Saturday appeared in all the glory of large type. The article shall not be repeated here at length, because it contained sundry quotations from Holy Writ which may as well be omitted, but the purport of it shall be explained. It commenced with a dis-

sertation against an undue love of wealth—the auri sacra fames, as the writer called it; and described with powerful unction the terrible straits into which, when indulged, it led the vile, wicked, ugly, hideous, loathsome, devilish, human heart. Then there was an eloquent passage referring to worms and dust and grass, and a quotation respecting treasures both corruptible and incorruptible. Not at once, but with crafty gradations, the author sloped away to the point of his subject. How fearful was it to watch the way in which the strong, wicked ones,—the roaring lions of the earth, beguiled the ignorance of the innocent, and led lonely lambs into their slaughter-houses. All this, much amplified, made up half the article; and then, after the manner of a pleasant relater of anecdotes, the clerical story-teller began his little tale. When, however, he came to the absolute writing of the tale, he found it to be prudent for the present to omit the names of his hero and heroine,—to omit, indeed, the names of all the persons concerned. He had first intended boldly to dare it all, and perhaps would yet have done so had he been quite sure of his editor. But his editor, he found, might object to these direct personalities at the first sound of the trumpet, unless the communication were made in the guise of a letter, with Mr. Maguire's name at the end of it. After a while the editor might become hot in the

fight himself, and then the names could be blazoned forth. And there existed some chance,—some small chance,—that the robber-lion, John Ball, might be induced to drop the lamb from his mouth when he heard this premonitory blast, and then the lion's prey might be picked up by—"the bold hunter," Mr. Maguire would probably have said, had he been called upon to finish the sentence himself; anyone else might, perhaps, say, by the jackal. The little story was told, therefore, without the mention of any names. Mr. Maguire had read other little stories told in another way in other newspapers, of greater weight, no doubt, than the Littlebath Christian Examiner, and had thought that he could wield a thunderbolt as well as any other Jupiter; but in wielding thunderbolts, as in all other operations of skill, a man must first try his 'prentice hand with some reticence; and thus he reconciled himself to prudence, not without some pangs of conscience which accused him inwardly of cowardice.

"Not long ago there was a lady in this town, loved and respected by all who knew her." Thus he began, and then gave a not altogether inaccurate statement of the whole affair, dropping of course his own share in the concern, and accusing the vile, wicked, hideous, loathsome human heart of the devouring lion, who lived some miles to the west end of London, of a brutal desire and a hellish

scheme to swallow up the inheritance of the innocent, loved, and respected lamb, in spite of the closest ties of consanguinity between them. And then he went on to tell how, with a base desire of covering up from the eyes of an indignant public his bestial greediness in having made this dishonest meal, the lion had proposed to himself the plan of marrying the lamb! It was a pity that Mr. Maguire had not learned,—that Miss Colza had not been able to tell him,—that the lion had once before expressed his wish to take the lamb for his wife. Had he known that, what a picture he would have drawn of the disappointed vindictive king of the forest, as lying in his lair at Twickenham he meditated his foul revenge! This unfortunately was unknown to Mr. Maguire and unsuspected by him.

But the article did not end here. The indignant writer of it went on to say that he had buckled on his armour in support of the lamb, and that he was ready to meet the lion either in the forest or in any social circle; either in the courts of law or before any Christian arbitrator. With loud trumpetings, he summoned the lion to appear and plead guilty, or to stand forward, if he dared, and declare himself innocent with his hand on his heart. If the lion could prove himself to be innocent the writer of that article offered him the right hand of fellowship, an offer which

the lion would not, perhaps, regard as any strong inducement; but, if the lion were not innocent,—if, as the writer of that article was well aware was the case, the lion was basely, greedily, bestially guilty, then the writer of that article pledged himself to give the lion no peace till he had disgorged his prey, and till the lamb was free to come back, with all her property, to that Christian circle in Littlebath which had loved her so warmly and respected her so thoroughly.

Such was the nature of the article, and the editor put it in. After all, what, in such matters, is an editor to do? Is it not his business to sell his paper? And if the editor of a Christian Examiner cannot trust the clergyman he has sat under, whom can he trust? Some risk an editor is obliged to run, or he will never sell his paper. There could be little doubt that such an article as this would be popular among the religious world of Littlebath, and that it would create a demand. He had his misgivings,—had that poor editor. He did not feel quite sure of his lion and his lamb. He talked the matter over vehemently with Mr. Maguire in the little room in which he occupied himself with his scissors and his paste; but ultimately the article was inserted.

Who does not know that interval of triumph which warms a man's heart when he has delivered his blow, and when the return blow has not been

yet received? The blow has been so well struck that it must be successful, nay, may probably be death-dealing. So felt Mr. Maguire when two dozen copies of the Christian Examiner were delivered at his lodgings on the Saturday morning. The article, though printed as a leading article, had been headed as a little story—"The Lion and the Lamb,"—so that it might more readily attract attention. It read very nicely in print. It had all that religious unction which is so necessary for Christian Examiners, and with it that spice of devilry, so delicious to humanity that without it even Christian Examiners cannot be made to sell themselves. He was very busy with his two dozen damp copies before him,—two dozen which had been sent to him, by agreement, as the price of his workmanship. He made them up and directed them with his own hand. To the lion and the lamb he sent two copies,—two to each. To Mr. Slow he sent a copy, and another to Messrs. Slow and Bideawhile, and a third to the other lawyer. He sent a copy to Lady Ball and one to Sir John. Another he sent to the old Mackenzie baronet at Incharrow, and two more to the baronet's eldest son and the baronet's eldest son's wife. A copy he sent to Mrs. Tom Mackenzie, and a copy to Miss Colza; and a copy also he sent to Mrs. Buggins. And he sent a copy to the Chairman of the Board at the Shadrach Fire Office, and another

to the Chairman at the Abednego Life Office. A copy he sent to Mr. Samuel Rubb, junior, and a copy to Messrs. Rubb and Mackenzie. Out of his own pocket he supplied the postage stamps, and with his own hand he dropped the papers into the Littlebath post-office.

Poor Miss Mackenzie, when she read the article, was stricken almost to the ground. How she did hate the man whose handwriting on the address she recognized at once! What should she do? In her agony she almost resolved that she would start at once for the Cedars and profess her willingness to go before all the magistrates in London and Littlebath, and swear that her cousin was no lion and that she was no lamb. At that moment her feelings towards the Christians and Christian Examiners of Littlebath were not the feelings of a Griselda. I think she could have spoken her mind freely had Mr. Maguire come in her way. Then, when she saw Mrs. Buggins' copy, her anger blazed up afresh, and her agony became more intense. The horrid man must have sent copies all over the world, or he would never have thought of sending a copy to Mrs. Buggins!

But she did not go to the Cedars. She reflected that when there she might probably find her cousin absent, and in such case she would hardly know how to address herself to her aunt. Mr. Ball, too, might perhaps come to her, and for

three days she patiently awaited his coming. On the evening of the third day there came to her, not Mr. Ball, but a clerk from Mr. Slow, the same clerk who had been with her before, and he made an appointment with her at Mr. Slow's office on the following morning. She was to meet Mr. Ball there, and also to meet Mr. Ball's lawyer. Of course she consented to go, and of course she was on Mr. Slow's staircase exactly at the time appointed. Of what she was thinking as she walked round Lincoln's Inn Fields to kill a quarter of an hour which she found herself to have on hand, we will not now inquire.

She was shown at once into Mr. Slow's room, and the first thing that met her eyes was a copy of that horrible Christian Examiner, lying on the table before him. She knew it instantly, and would have known it had she simply seen a corner of the printing. To her eyes and to her mind, no other printed paper had ever been so ugly and so vicious. But she saw that there was also another newspaper under the Christian Examiner. Mr. Slow brought her to the fire, and gave her a chair, and was very courteous. In a few moments came the other lawyer, and with him came John Ball.

Mr. Slow opened the conference, all the details of which need not be given here. He first asked Miss Mackenzie whether she had seen that wicked libel. She, with much energy and, I may almost

say, with virulence, declared that the horrid paper had been sent to her. She hoped that nobody suspected that she had known anything about it. In answer to this, they all assured her that she need not trouble herself on that head. Mr. Slow then told her that a London paper had copied the whole story of the "Lion and the Lamb," expressing a hope that the Lion would be exposed if there was any truth in it, and that the writer would be exposed if there was none.

"The writer was Mr. Maguire, a clergyman," said Miss Mackenzie, with indignation.

"We all know that," said Mr. Slow, with a slight smile on his face. Then he went on reading the remarks of the London paper, which declared that the Littlebath Christian Examiner, having gone so far, must, of necessity, go further. The article was calculated to give the greatest pain to, no doubt, many persons; and the innocence or guilt of "the Lion," as poor John Ball was called, must be made manifest to the public.

"And now, my dear Miss Mackenzie, I will tell you what we propose to do," said Mr. Slow, He then explained that it was absolutely necessary that a question of law should be tried and settled in a court of law, between her and her cousin. When she protested against this, he endeavoured to explain to her that the cause would be an amicable cause,—a simple reference,

in short, to a legal tribunal. Of course, she did not understand this, and, of course, she still protested; but after a while, when she began to perceive that her protest was of no avail, she let that matter drop. The cause should be brought on as soon as possible, but could not be decided till late in the spring. She was told that she had better make no great change in her own manner of life till that time, and was again informed that she could have what money she wanted for her own maintenance. She refused to take any money; but when the reference was made to some proposed change in her life, she looked wistfully into her cousin's face. He, however, had nothing to say then, and kept his eyes intently fixed upon the carpet.

Mr. Slow then took up the Christian Examiner, and declared to her what was their intention with reference to that. A letter should be written from his house to the editor of the London newspaper, giving a plain statement of the case, with all the names, explaining that all the parties were acting in perfect concert, and that the matter was to be decided in the only way which could be regarded as satisfactory. In answer to this, Miss Mackenzie, almost in tears, pointed out how distressing would be the publicity thus given to her name "particularly,"—she said, "particularly——." But she could not go on with the

expression of her thoughts, or explain that so public a reference to a proposal of marriage from her cousin must be doubly painful to her, seeing that the idea of such a marriage had been abandoned. But Mr. Slow understood all this, and, coming over to her, took her gently by the hand.

"My dear," he said, "you may trust me in this as though I were your father. I know that such publicity is painful; but, believe me, it is the best that we can do."

Of course she had no alternative but to yield.

When the interview was over, her cousin walked home with her to Arundel Street, and said much to her as to the necessity for this trial. He said so much, that she, at last, dimly understood that the matter could not be set at rest by her simple renouncing of the property. Her own lawyer could not allow her to do so; nor could he, John Ball, consent to receive the property in such a manner. "You see, by that newspaper, what people would say of me."

But had he not the power of making everything easy by doing that which he himself had before proposed to do? Why did he not again say, "Margaret, come and be my wife?" She acknowledged to herself that he had a right to act as though he had never said those words—that the facts elicited by Mr. Maguire's visit to the Cedars were sufficient to absolve him from his offer.

But yet she thought that they should have been sufficient also to induce him to renew it.

On that occasion, when he left her at the door in Arundel Street, he had not renewed his offer.

CHAPTER X.

LADY BALL IN ARUNDEL STREET.

On Christmas-day Miss Mackenzie was pressed very hard to eat her Christmas dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Buggins, and she almost gave way. She had some half-formed idea in her head that should she once sit down to table with Buggins, she would have given up the fight altogether. She had no objection to Buggins, and had, indeed, no strong objection to put herself on a par with Buggins; but she felt that she could not be on a par with Buggins and with John Ball at the same time. Why it should be that in associating with the man she would take a step downwards, and might yet associate with the man's wife without taking any step downwards, she did not attempt to explain to herself. But I think that she could have explained it had she put herself to the task of analyzing the question, and that she felt exactly the result of such analysis without making it. At any rate, she refused the invitation persistently,

and ate her wretched dinner alone in her bedroom.

She had often told herself, in those days of her philosophy at Littlebath, that she did not care to be a lady; and she told herself now the same thing very often when she was thinking of the hospital. She cosseted herself with no false ideas as to the nature of the work which she proposed to undertake. She knew very well that she might have to keep rougher company than that of Buggins if she put her shoulder to that wheel. She was willing enough to do this, and had been willing to encounter such company ever since she left the Cedars. She was prepared for the roughness. But she would not put herself beyond the pale, as it were, of her cousin's hearth, moved simply by a temptation to relieve the monotony of her life. When the work came within her reach she would go to it, but till then she would bear the wretchedness of her dull room up-stairs. She wondered whether he ever thought how wretched she must be in her solitude.

On New Year's-day she heard that her uncle was dead. She was already in mourning for her brother, and was therefore called upon to make no change in that respect. She wrote a note of condolence to her aunt, in which she strove much, and vainly, to be cautious and sympathetic at the same time, and in return received a note,

in which Lady Ball declared her purpose of coming to Arundel Street to see her niece as soon as she found herself able to leave the house. She would, she said, give Margaret warning the day beforehand, as it would be very sad if she had her journey all for nothing.

Her aunt, Lady Ball, was coming to see her in Arundel Street! What could be the purpose of such a visit after all that had passed between them? And why should her aunt trouble herself to make it at a period of such great distress? Lady Ball must have some very important plan to propose, and poor Margaret's heart was in a flutter. It was ten days after this before the second promised note arrived, and then Margaret was asked to say whether she would be at home and able to receive her aunt's visit at ten minutes past two on the day but one following. Margaret wrote back to say that she would be at home at ten minutes past two on the day named.

Her aunt was old, and she again borrowed the parlour, though she was not now well inclined to ask favours from Mrs. Buggins. Mrs. Buggins had taken to heart the slight put upon her husband, and sometimes made nasty little speeches.

"Oh dear, yes, in course, Miss Margaret; not that I ever did think much of them Ballses, and less than ever now, since the gentleman was kind enough to send me the newspaper. But she's

welcome to the room, seeing as how Mr. Tiddy will be in the city, of course; and you're welcome to it, too, though you do keep yourself so close to yourself,—which won't ever bring you round to have your money again; that it won't."

Lady Ball came, and was shown into the parlour, and her niece went down to receive her.

"I would have been here before you came, aunt, only the room is not mine."

In answer to this, Lady Ball said that it did very well. Any room would answer the present purpose. Then she sat down on the sofa from which she had risen. She was dressed, of course, in the full weeds of her widowhood, and the wide extent of her black crape was almost awful in Margaret's eyes. She did not look to be so savage as her niece had sometimes seen her, but there was about her a ponderous accumulation of crape, which made her even more formidable than she used to be. It would be almost impossible to refuse anything to a person so black, so grave, so heavy, and so big.

"I have come to you, my dear," she said, "as soon as I possibly could after the sad event which we have had at home."

In answer to this, Margaret said that she was much obliged, but she hoped that her aunt had put herself to no trouble. Then she said a word or two, about her uncle,—a word or two that

was very difficult, as of course it could mean nothing.

"Yes," said the widow, "he has been taken from us after a long and useful life. I hope his son will always show himself to be worthy of such a father."

After that there was silence in the room for a minute or two, during which Margaret waited for her aunt to begin; but Lady Ball sat there solid, grave, and black, as though she thought that her very presence, without any words, might be effective upon Margaret as a preliminary mode of attack. Margaret herself could find nothing to say to her aunt, and she, therefore, also remained silent. Lady Ball was so far successful in this, that when three minutes were over her niece had certainly been weakened by the oppressive nature of the meeting. She had about her less of vivacity, and perhaps also less of vitality, than when she first entered the room.

"Well, my dear," said her aunt at last, "there are things, you know, which must be talked about, though they are ever so disagreeable;" and then she pulled out of her pocket that abominable number of the Littlebath Christian Examiner.

"Oh, aunt, I hope you are not going to talk about that."

"My dear, that is cowardly; it is, indeed. How am I to help talking about it? I have

come here, from Twickenham, on purpose to talk about it."

"Then, aunt, I must decline; I must, indeed."

"My dear!"

"I must, indeed, aunt."

Let a man or a woman's vitality be ever so thoroughly crushed and quenched by fatigue or oppression,—or even by black crape,—there will always be some mode of galvanizing which will restore it for a time, some specific either of joy or torture which will produce a return of temporary energy. This Littlebath newspaper was a battery of sufficient power to put Margaret on her legs again, though she perhaps might not be long able to keep them.

"It is a vile, lying paper, and it was written by a vile, lying man, and I hope you will put it up and say nothing about it."

"It is a vile, lying paper, Margaret; but the lies are against my son, and not against you."

"He is a man, and knows what he is about, and it does not signify to him. But, aunt, I won't talk about it, and there's an end of it."

"I hope he does know what he is about," said Lady Ball. "I hope he does. But you, as you say, are a woman, and therefore it specially behoves you to know what you are about."

"I am not doing anything to anybody," said Margaret.

Lady Ball had now refolded the offensive newspaper, and restored it to her pocket. Perhaps she had done as much with it as she had from the first intended. At any rate, she brought it forth no more, and made no further intentionally direct allusion to it. "I don't suppose you really wish to do any injury to anybody," she said.

"Does anybody accuse me of doing them an injury?" Margaret asked.

"Well, my dear, if I were to say that I accused you, perhaps you would misunderstand me. I hope,—I thoroughly expect, that before I leave you, I may be able to say that I do not accuse you. If you will only listen to me patiently for a few minutes, Margaret,—which I couldn't get you to do, you know, before you went away from the Cedars in that very extraordinary manner,—I think I can explain to you something which——." Here Lady Ball became embarrassed, and paused; but Margaret gave her no assistance, and therefore she began a new sentence. "In point of fact, I want you to listen to what I say, and then, I think,—I do think,—you will do as we would have you."

Whom did she include in that word "we?" Margaret had still sufficient vitality not to let the word pass by unquestioned.

"You mean yourself and John?" said she.

"I mean the family," said Lady Ball, rather sharply. "I mean the whole family, including

those dear girls to whom I have been in the position of a mother since my son's wife died. It is in the name of the Ball family that I now speak, and surely I have a right."

Margaret thought that Lady Ball had no such right, but she would not say so at that moment.

"Well, Margaret, to come to the point at once, the fact is this. You must renounce any idea that you may still have of becoming my son's wife." Then she paused.

"Has John sent you here to say this?" demanded Margaret.

"I don't wish you to ask any such question as that. If you had any real regard for him, I don't think you would ask it. Consider his difficulties, and consider the position of those poor children! If he were your brother, would you advise him, at his age, to marry a woman without a farthing, and also to incur the certain disgrace which would attach to his name after—after—after all that has been said about it in this newspaper?"—then, Lady Ball put her hand upon her pocket;—"in this newspaper, and in others?"

This was more than Margaret could bear. "There would be no disgrace," said she, jumping to her feet.

"Margaret, if you put yourself into a passion, how can you understand reason? You ought to know, yourself, by the very fact of your being in

a passion, that you are wrong. Would there be no disgrace, after all that has come out about Mr. Maguire?"

"No, none,—none!" almost shouted this modern Griselda. "There could be no disgrace. I won't admit it. As for his marrying me, I don't expect it. There is nothing to bind him to me. If he doesn't come to me, I certainly shall not go to him. I have looked upon it as all over between him and me; and as I have not troubled him with any importunities, nor yet you, it is cruel in you to come to me in this way. He is free to do what he likes;—why don't you go to him? But there would be no disgrace."

"Of course he is free. Of course such a marriage never can take place now. It is quite out of the question. You say that it is all over, and you are quite right. Why not let this be settled in a friendly way between you and me, so that we might be friends again? I should be so glad to help you in your difficulties if you would agree with me about this."

"I want no help."

"Margaret, that is nonsense. In your position you are very wrong to set your natural friends at defiance. If you will only authorize me to say that you renounce this marriage——"

"I will not renounce it," said Margaret, who was still standing up. "I will not renounce it.

I would sooner lose my tongue than let it say such a word. You may tell him, if you choose to tell him anything, that I demand nothing from him; nothing. All that I once thought mine is now his, and I demand nothing from him. But when he asked me to be his wife he told me to be firm, and in that I will obey him. He may renounce me, and I shall have nothing with which to reproach him; but I will never renounce him,—never." And then the modern Griselda, who had been thus galvanized into vitality, stood over her aunt in a mood that was almost triumphant.

"Margaret, I am astonished at you," said Lady Ball, when she had recovered herself.

"I can't help that, aunt."

"And now let me tell you this. My son is, of course, old enough to do as he pleases. If he chooses to ruin himself and his children by marrying, anybody—even if it were out of the streets,—I can't help it. Stop a moment, and hear me to the end." This she said, as her niece had made a movement as though towards the door. "I say, even if it were out of the streets, I couldn't help it. But nothing shall induce me to live in the same house with him if he marries you. It will be on your conscience for ever that you have brought ruin on the whole family, and that will be your punishment. As for me, I shall take myself off to some solitude, and—there—I—shall

—die." Then Lady Ball put her handkerchief up to her face and wept copiously.

Margaret stood still, leaning upon the table, but she spoke no word, either in answer to the threat or to the tears. Her immediate object was to take herself out of the room, but this she did not know how to achieve. At last her aunt spoke again: "If you please, I will get you to ask your landlady to send for a cab." Then the cab was procured, and Buggins, who had come home for his dinner, handed her ladyship in. Not a word had been spoken during the time that the cab was being fetched, and when Lady Ball went down the passage, she merely said, "I wish you good-bye, Margaret."

"Good-bye," said Margaret, and then she escaped to her own bedroom.

Lady Ball had not done her work well. It was not within her power to induce Margaret to renounce her engagement, and had she known her niece better, I do not think that she would have made the attempt. She did succeed in learning that Margaret had received no renewal of an offer from her son,—that there was, in fact, no positive engagement now existing between them; and with this, I think, she should have been satisfied. Margaret had declared that she demanded nothing from her cousin, and with this assurance Lady Ball should have been contented. But she had

thought to carry her point, to obtain the full swing of her will, by means of a threat, and had forgotten that in the very words of her own menace she conveyed to Margaret some intimation that her son was still desirous of doing that very thing which she was so anxious to prevent. There was no chance that her threat should have any effect on Margaret. She ought to have known that the tone of the woman's mind was much too firm for that. Margaret knew,—was as sure of it as any woman could be sure,—that her cousin was bound to her by all ties of honour. She believed, too, that he was bound to her by love, and that if he should finally desert it, he would be moved to do so by mean motives. It was no anger on the score of Mr. Maguire that would bring him to such a course, no suspicion that she was personally unworthy of being his wife. Our Griselda, with all her power of suffering and willingness to suffer, understood all that, and was by no means disposed to give way to any threat from Lady Ball.

When she was up-stairs, and once more in solitude, she disgraced herself again by crying. She could be strong enough when attacked by others, but could not be strong when alone. She cried and sobbed upon her bed, and then, rising, looked at herself in the glass, and told herself that she was old and ugly, and fitted only for that hospital

nursing of which she had been thinking. But still there was something about her heart that bore her up. Lady Ball would not have come to her, would not have exercised her eloquence upon her, would not have called upon her to renounce this engagement, had she not found all similar attempts upon her own son to be ineffectual. Could it then be so, that, after all, her cousin would be true to her? If it were so, if it could be so, what would she not do for him and for his children? If it were so, how blessed would have been all these troubles that had brought her to such a haven at last! Then she tried to reconcile his coldness to her with that which she so longed to believe might be the fact. She was not to expect him to be a lover such as are young men. Was she young herself, or would she like him better if he were to assume anything of youth in his manners? She understood that life with him was a serious thing, and that it was his duty to be serious and grave in what he did. It might be that it was essential to his character, after all that had passed, that the question of the property should be settled finally, before he could come to her, and declare his wishes. Thus flattering herself, she put away from her her tears, and dressed herself, smoothing her hair, and washing away the traces of her weeping; and then again she looked at herself in the glass to see if it

were possible that she might be comely in his eyes.

The months of January and February slowly wore themselves away, and during the whole of that time Margaret saw her cousin but once, and then she met him at Mr. Slow's chambers. She had gone there to sign some document, and there she had found him. She had then been told that she would certainly lose her cause. No one who had looked into the matter had any doubt of that. It certainly was the case that Jonathan Ball had bequeathed property which was not his at the time he made the will, but which at the time of his death, in fact, absolutely belonged to his nephew, John Ball. Old Mr. Slow, as he explained this now for the seventh or eighth time, did it without a tone of regret in his voice, or a sign of sorrow in his eye. Margaret had become so used to the story now, that it excited no strong feelings within her. Her wish, she said, was, that the matter should be settled. The lawyer, with almost a smile on his face, but still shaking his head, said that he feared it could not be settled before the end of April. John Ball sat by, leaning his face, as usual, upon his umbrella, and saying nothing. It did, for a moment, strike Miss Mackenzie as singular, that she should be reduced from affluence to absolute nothingness in the way of property, in so very placid

a manner. Mr. Slow seemed to be thinking that he was, upon the whole, doing rather well for his client.

"Of course you understand, Miss Mackenzie, that you can have any money you require for your present personal wants."

This had been said to her so often, that she took it as one of Mr. Slow's legal formulas, which meant nothing to the laity.

On that occasion also Mr. Ball walked home with her, and was very eloquent about the law's delays. He also seemed to speak as though there was nothing to be regretted by anybody, except the fact that he could not get possession of the property as quick as he wished. He said not a word of anything else, and Margaret, of course, submitted to be talked to by him rather than to talk herself. Of Lady Ball's visit he said not a word, nor did she. She asked after the children, and especially after Jack. One word she did say:

"I had hoped Jack would have come to see me at my lodgings."

"Perhaps he had better not," said Jack's father, "till all is settled. We have had much to trouble us at home since my father's death."

Then of course she dropped that subject. She had been greatly startled on that day on hearing her cousin called Sir John by Mr. Slow. Up to that moment it had never occurred to her that

the man of whom she was so constantly thinking as her possible husband was a baronet. To have been Mrs. Ball seemed to her to have been possible; but that she should become Lady Ball was hardly possible. She wished that he had not been called Sir John. It seemed to her to be almost natural that people should be convinced of the impropriety of such a one as her becoming the wife of a baronet.

During this period she saw her sister-in-law once or twice, who on those occasions came down to Arundel Street. She herself would not go to Gower Street, because of the presence of Miss Colza. Miss Colza still continued to live there, and still continued very much in arrear in her contributions to the household fund. Mrs. Mackenzie did not turn her out, because she would,—so she said,—in such case get nothing. Mrs. Tom was by this time quite convinced that the property would, either justly or unjustly, go into the hands of John Ball, and she was therefore less anxious to make any sacrifice to please her sister-in-law.

"I'm sure I don't see why you should be so bitter against her," said Mrs. Tom. "I don't suppose she told the clergyman a word that wasn't true."

Miss Mackenzie declined to discuss the subject, and assured Mrs. Tom that she only recommended

the banishment of Miss Colza because of her apparent unwillingness to pay.

"As for the money," said Mrs. Tom, "I expect Mr. Rubb to see to that. I suppose he intends to make her Mrs. Rubb sooner or later."

Miss Mackenzie, having some kindly feeling towards Mr. Rubb, would have preferred to hear that Miss Colza was likely to become Mrs. Maguire. During these visits, Mrs. Tom got more than one five-pound note from her sister-in-law, pleading the difficulty she had in procuring breakfast for lodgers without any money for the baker. Margaret protested against these encroachments, but, still, the money would be forthcoming.

Once towards the end of February, Mrs. Buggins seduced her lodger down into her parlour in the area, and Miss Mackenzie thought she perceived that something of the old servant's manners had returned to her. She was more respectful than she had been of late, and made no attempt at smart, ill-natured speeches.

"It's a weary life, Miss, this you're living here, isn't it?" said she.

Margaret said that it was weary, but that there could be no change till the lawsuit should be settled. It would be settled, she hoped, in April.

"Bother it for a lawsuit," said Mrs. Buggins. "They all tells me that it ain't any lawsuit at all, really."

"It's an amicable lawsuit," said Miss Mackenzie.

"I never see such amicableness! 'Tis a wonder to hear, Miss, how everybody is talking about it everywheres. Where we was last night,—that is, Buggins and I,—most respectable people in the copying line;—it isn't only he as does the copying, but she too; nusses the baby, and minds the kitchen fire, and goes on, sheet after sheet, all at the same time; and a very tidy thing they make of it, only they do straggle their words so;—well, they were saying as it's one of the most remarkablest cases as ever was know'd."

"I don't see that I shall be any the better because it's talked about."

"Well, Miss Margaret, I'm not so sure of that. It's my belief that if one only gets talked about enough, one may have a'most anything one chooses to ask for."

"But I don't want to ask for anything."

"But if what we heard last night is all true, there's somebody else that does want to ask for something, or, as has asked, as folks say."

Margaret blushed up to the eyes, and then protested that she did not know what Mrs. Buggins meant.

"I never dreamed of it, my dear; indeed, I didn't, when the old lady come here with her tantrums; but now, it's as plain as a pikestaff.

If I'd a' known anything about that, my dear, I shouldn't have made so free about Buggins; indeed, I shouldn't."

"You're talking nonsense, Mrs. Buggins; indeed, you are."

"They have the whole story all over the town at any rate, and in the lane, and all about the courts; and they declare it don't matter a toss of a halfpenny which way the matter goes, as you're to become Lady Ball the very moment the case is settled."

Miss Mackenzie protested that Mrs. Buggins was a stupid woman,—the stupidest woman she had ever heard or seen; and then hurried up into her own room to hug herself in her joy, and teach herself to believe that what so many people said must at last come true.

Three days after this, a very fine, private carriage, with two servants on a hammer cloth, drove up to the door in Arundel Street, and the maid-servant, hurrying up stairs, told Miss Mackenzie that a beautifully-dressed lady down stairs was desirous of seeing her immediately.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. MACKENZIE OF CAVENDISH SQUARE.

"My dear," said the beautifully-dressed lady, "you don't know me, I think;" and the beautifully-dressed lady came up to Miss Mackenzie very cordially, took her by the hand, smiled upon her, and seemed to be a very good-natured person indeed. Margaret told the lady that she did not know her, and at that moment was altogether at a loss to guess who the lady might be. The lady might be forty years of age, but was still handsome, and carried with her that easy, self-assured, well-balanced manner, which, if it be not overdone, goes so far to make up for beauty, if beauty itself be wanting.

"I am your cousin, Mrs. Mackenzie,—Clara Mackenzie. My husband is Walter Mackenzie, and his father is Sir Walter Mackenzie, of Inch-arrow. Now you will know all about me."

"Oh, yes, I know now," said Margaret.

"I ought, I suppose, to make ever so many

apologies for not coming to you before; but I did call upon you, ever so long ago; I forget when, and after that you went to live at Littlebath. And then we heard of you as being with Lady Ball, and for some reason, which I don't quite understand, it has always been supposed that Lady Ball and I were not to know each other. And now I have heard this wonderful story about your fortune, and about everything else, too, my dear; and it seems all very beautiful, and very romantic; and everybody says that you have behaved so well; and so, to make a long story short, I have come to find you out in your hermitage, and to claim cousinship, and all that sort of thing."

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you, Mrs. Mackenzie——"

"Don't say it in that way, my dear, or else you'll make me think you mean to turn a cold shoulder on me for not coming to you before"

"Oh, no."

"But we've only just come to town; and though of course I heard the story down in Scotland——"

"Did you?"

"Did I? Why everybody is talking about it, and the newspapers have been full of it."

"Oh, Mrs. Mackenzie, that is so terrible."

"But nobody has said a word against you. Even that stupid clergyman, who calls you the

Lamb, has not pretended to say that you were his lamb. We had the whole story of the Lion and the Lamb in the Inverary Interpreter, but I had no idea that it was you, then. But the long and the short of it is, that my husband says he must know his cousin; and to tell the truth, it was he that sent me; and we want you to come and stay with us in Cavendish Square till the lawsuit is over, and everything is settled."

Margaret was so startled by the proposition, that she did not know how to answer it. Of course she was at first impressed with a strong idea of the impossibility of her complying with such a request, and was simply anxious to find some proper way of refusing it. The Incharrow Mackenzies were great people who saw much company, and it was, she thought, quite out of the question that she should go to their house. At no time of her career would she have been, as she conceived, fit to live with such grand persons; but at the present moment, when she grudged herself even a new pair of gloves out of the money remaining to her, while she was still looking forward to a future life passed as a nurse in a hospital, she felt that there would be an absolute unfitness in such a visit.

"You are very kind," she said at last with faltering voice, as she meditated in what words she might best convey her refusal.

"No, I'm not a bit kind; and I know from the tone of your voice that you are meditating a refusal. But I don't mean to accept it. It is much better that you should be with us while all this is going on, than that you should be living here alone. And there is no one with whom you could live during this time so properly, as with those who are your nearest relatives."

"But, Mrs. Mackenzie——"

"I suppose you are thinking now of another cousin, but it's not at all proper that you should go to his house;—not as yet, you know. And you need not suppose that he'll object because of what I said about Lady Ball and myself. The Capulets and the Montagues don't intend to keep it up for ever; and, though we have never visited Lady Ball, my husband and the present Sir John know each other very well."

Mrs. Mackenzie was not on that occasion able to persuade Margaret to come at once to Cavendish Square, and neither was Margaret able to give a final refusal. She did not intend to go, but she could not bring herself to speak a positive answer in such a way as to have much weight with Mrs. Mackenzie. That lady left her at last, saying that she would send her husband, and promising Margaret that she would herself come in ten days to fetch her.

"Oh no," said Margaret; "it will be very

good-natured of you to come, but not for that."

"But I shall come, and shall come for that," said Mrs. Mackenzie; and at the end of the ten days she did come, and she did carry her husband's cousin back with her to Cavendish Square.

In the mean time Walter Mackenzie had called in Arundel Street, and had seen Margaret. But there had been given to her advice by a counsellor whom she was more inclined to obey than any of the Mackenzies. John Ball had written to her, saying that he had heard of the proposition, and recommending her to accept the invitation given to her.

"Till all this trouble about the property is settled," said he, "it will be much better that you should be with your cousins than living alone in Mrs. Buggins' lodgings."

After receiving this Margaret held out no longer, but was carried off by the handsome lady in the grand carriage, very much to the delight of Mrs. Buggins.

Mrs. Buggins' respect for Miss Mackenzie had returned altogether since she had heard of the invitation to Cavendish Square, and she apologized, almost without ceasing, for the liberty she had taken in suggesting that Margaret should drink tea with her husband.

"And indeed, Miss, I shouldn't have proposed

such a thing, were it ever so, if I had suspected for a hinstant how things were a going to be. For Buggins is a man as knows his place, and never puts hisself beyond it! But you was that close, Miss——"

In answer to this Margaret would say that it didn't signify, and that it wasn't on that account; and I have no doubt but that the two women thoroughly understood each other.

There was a subject on which, in spite of all her respect, Mrs. Buggins ventured to give Miss Mackenzie much advice, and to insist on that advice strongly. Mrs. Buggins was very anxious that the future "baronet's lady" should go out upon her grand visit with a proper assortment of clothing. That argument of the baronet's lady was the climax of Mrs. Buggins' eloquence: "You, my dear, as is going to be one baronet's lady is going to a lady who is going to be another baronet's lady, and it's only becoming you should go as is becoming."

Margaret declared that she was not going to be anybody's lady, but Mrs. Buggins altogether pooh-poohed this assertion.

"That, Miss, is your predestination," said Mrs. Buggins, "and well you'll become it. And as for money, doesn't that old party who found it all out say reg'lar once a month that there's whatever you want to take for your own necessaries?

and you that haven't had a shilling from him yet! If it was me, I'd send him in such a bill for necessaries as 'd open that old party's eyes a bit, and hurry him up with his lawsuits."

The matter was at last compromised between her and Margaret, and a very moderate expenditure for smarter clothing was incurred.

On the day appointed Mrs. Mackenzie again came, and Margaret was carried off to Cavendish Square. Here she found herself suddenly brought into a mode of life altogether different from anything she had as yet experienced. The Mackenzies were people who went much into society, and received company frequently at their own house. The first of these evils for a time Margaret succeeded in escaping, but from the latter she had no means of withdrawing herself. There was very much to astonish her at this period of her life, but that which astonished her perhaps more than anything else was her own celebrity. Everybody had heard of the Lion and the Lamb, and everybody was aware that she was supposed to represent the milder of those two favourite animals. Everybody knew the story of her property, or rather of the property which had never in truth been hers, and which was now being made to pass out of her hands by means of a lawsuit, of which everybody spoke as though it were the best thing in the world for all the parties concerned. People,

when they mentioned Sir John Ball to her,—and he was often so mentioned,—never spoke of him in harsh terms, as though he were her enemy. She observed that he was always named before her in that euphuistic language which we naturally use when we speak to persons of those who are nearest to them and dearest to them. The romance of the thing, and not the pity of it, was the general subject of discourse, so that she could not fail to perceive that she was generally regarded as the future wife of Sir John Ball.

It was the sudden way in which all this had come upon her that affected her so greatly. While staying in Arundel Street she had been altogether ignorant that the story of the Lion and the Lamb had become public, or that her name had been frequent in men's mouths. When Mrs. Buggins had once told her that she was thus becoming famous, she had ridiculed Mrs. Buggins' statement. Mrs. Buggins had brought home word from some tea-party that the story had been discussed among her own friends; but Miss Mackenzie had regarded that as an accident. A lawyer's clerk or two about Chancery Lane or Carey Street might by chance hear of the matter in the course of their daily work;—that it should be so, and that such people talked of her affairs distressed her; but that had, she was sure, been all. Now, however, in her new home she learned that Mr.

Maguire's efforts had become notorious, and that she and her history were public property. When all this first became plain to her, it overwhelmed her so greatly that she was afraid to show her face; but this feeling gradually wore itself away, and she found herself able to look around upon the world again, and ask herself new questions of the future, as she had done when she had first found herself to be the possessor of her fortune.

When she had been about three weeks with the Mackenzies, Sir John Ball came to see her. He had written to her once before that, but his letter had referred simply to some matter of business. When he was shown into the drawing-room in Cavendish Square, Mrs. Mackenzie and Margaret were both there, but the former in a few minutes got up and left the room. Margaret had wished with all her heart that her hostess would remain with them. She was sure that Sir John Ball had nothing to say that she would care to hear, and his saying nothing would seem to be of no special moment while three persons were in the room. But his saying nothing when special opportunity for speaking had been given to him would be of moment to her. Her destiny was in his hands to such a degree that she felt his power over her to amount almost to a cruelty. She longed to ask him what her fate was to be, but it was a question that she could not put to him.

She knew that he would not tell her now; and she knew also that the very fact of his not telling her would inflict upon her a new misery, and deprive her of the comfort which she was beginning to enjoy. If he could not tell her at once how all this was to be ended, it would be infinitely better for her that he should remain away from her altogether.

As soon as Mrs. Mackenzie had left the room he began to describe to her his last interview with the lawyers. She listened to him, and pretended to interest herself, but she did not care two straws about the lawyers. Point after point he explained to her, showing the unfortunate ingenuity with which his uncle Jonathan had contrived to confuse his affairs, and Margaret attempted to appear concerned. But her mind had now for some months past refused to exert itself with reference to the mode in which Mr. Jonathan Ball had disposed of his money. Two years ago she had been told that it was hers; since that, she had been told that it was not hers. She had felt the hardship of this at first; but now that feeling was over with her, and she did not care to hear more about it. But she did care very much to know what was to be her future fate.

"And when will be the end of it, John?" she asked him.

"Ha! that seems so hard to say. They did

name the first of April, but it won't be so soon as that. Mr. Slow said to-day about the end of April, but his clerk seems to think it will be the middle of May."

"It is very provoking," said Margaret.

"Yes, it is," said John Ball, "very provoking; I feel it so. It worries me so terribly that I have no comfort in life. But I suppose you find everything very nice here."

"They are very kind to me."

"Very kind, indeed. It was quite the proper thing for them to do; and when I heard that Mrs. Mackenzie had been to you in Arundel Street, I was delighted."

Margaret did not dare to tell him that she would have preferred to have been left in Arundel Street; but that, at the moment, was her feeling. If, when all this was over, she would still have to earn her bread, it would have been much better for her not to have come among her rich relations. What good would it then do her to have lived two or three months in Cavendish Square?

"I wish it were all settled, John," she said; and as she spoke there was a tear standing in the corner of each eye.

"I wish it were, indeed," said John Ball; but I think that he did not see the tears.

It was on her tongue to speak some word

about the hospital; but she felt that if she did so now, it would be tantamount to asking him that question which it did not become her to ask; so she repressed the word, and sat in silence.

"When the day is positively fixed for the hearing," said he, "I will be sure to let you know."

"I wish you would let me know nothing further about it, John, till it is all settled."

"I sometimes almost fancy that I wish the same thing," said he, with a faint attempt at a smile; and after that he got up and went his way.

This was not to be endured. Margaret declared to herself that she could not live and bear it. Let the people around her say what they would, it could not be that he would treat her in this way if he intended to make her his wife. It would be better for her to make up her mind that it was not to be so, and to insist on leaving the Mackenzies' house. She would go, not again to Arundel Street, but to some lodging further away, in some furthest recess of London, where no one would come to her and flurry her with false hopes, and there remain till she might be allowed to earn her bread. That was the mood in which Mrs. Mackenzie found her late in the afternoon on the day of

Sir John Ball's visit. There was to be a dinner party in the house that evening, and Margaret began by asking leave to absent herself.

"Nonsense, Margaret," said Mrs. Mackenzie; "I won't have anything of the kind."

"I cannot come down, Mrs. Mackenzie; I cannot, indeed."

"That is absolute nonsense. That man has been saying something unkind to you. Why do you mind what he says?"

"He has not said anything unkind; he has not said anything at all."

"Oh, that's the grief, is it?"

"I don't know what you mean by grief; but if you were situated as I am you would perceive that you were in a false position."

"I am sure he has been saying something unkind to you."

Margaret hardly knew how to tell her thoughts and feelings, and yet she wished to tell them. She had resolved that she would tell the whole to Mrs. Mackenzie, having convinced herself that she could not carry out her plan of leaving Cavendish Square without some explanation of the kind. She did not know how to make her speech with propriety, so she jumped at the difficulty boldly. "The truth is, Mrs. Mackenzie, that he has no more idea of marrying me than he has of marrying you."

"Margaret, how can you talk such nonsense?"

"It is not nonsense; it is true; and it will be much better that it should all be understood at once. I have nothing to blame him for, nothing; and I don't blame him; but I cannot bear this kind of life any longer. It is killing me. What business have I to be living here in this way, when I have got nothing of my own, and have no one to depend on but myself?"

"Then he must have said something to you; but, whatever it was, you cannot but have misunderstood him."

"No; he has said nothing, and I have not misunderstood him." Then there was a pause.

"He has said nothing to me, and I am bound to understand what that means."

"Margaret, I want to put one question to you," said Mrs. Mackenzie, speaking with a serious air that was very unusual with her;—"and you will understand, dear, that I only do so because of what you are saying now."

"You may put any question you please to me," said Margaret.

"Has your cousin ever asked you to be his wife, or has he not?"

"Yes, he has. He has asked me twice."

"And what answer did you make him."

"When I thought all the property was mine, I refused him. Then, when the property be-

came his, he asked me again, and I accepted him. Sometimes, when I think of that, I feel so ashamed of myself, that I hardly dare to hold up my head."

"But you did not accept him simply because you had lost your money."

"No; but it looks so like it; does it not? And of course he must think that I did so."

"I am quite sure he thinks nothing of the kind. But he did ask you, and you did accept him?"

"Oh, yes."

"And since that, has he ever said anything to you to signify that the match should be broken off?"

"The very day after he had asked me, Mr. Maguire came to the Cedars and saw me, and Lady Ball was there too. And he was very false, and told my aunt things that were altogether untrue. He said that,—that I had promised to marry him, and Lady Ball believed him."

"But did Mr. Ball believe him?"

"My aunt said all that she could against me, and when John spoke to me the next day, it was clear that he was very angry with me."

"But did he believe you or Mr. Maguire when you told him that Mr. Maguire's story was a falsehood from beginning to end?"

"But it was not a falsehood from beginning to end. That's where I have been so very, very unfortunate; and perhaps I ought to say, as I don't want to hide anything from you, so very, very wrong. The man did ask me to marry him, and I had given him no answer."

"Had you thought of accepting him?"

"I had not thought about that at all when he came to me. So I told him that I would consider it all, and that he must come again."

"And he came again."

"Then my brother's illness occurred, and I went to London. After that Mr. Maguire wrote to me two or three times, and I refused him in the plainest language that I could use. I told him that I had lost all my fortune, and then I was sure that there would be an end of any trouble from him; but he came to the Cedars on purpose to do me all this injury; and now that he has put all these stories about me into the newspapers, how can I think that any man would like to make me his wife? I have no right to be surprised that Lady Ball should be so eager against it."

"But did Mr. Ball believe you when you told him this story?"

"I think he did believe me."

"And what did he say?"

Margaret did not answer at once, but sat

with her fingers up among her hair upon her brow :

"I am trying to think what were his words," she said, "but I cannot remember. I spoke more than he did. He said that I should have told him about Mr. Maguire, and I tried to explain to him that there had been no time to do so. Then I said that he could leave me if he liked."

"And what did he answer?"

"If I remember rightly he made no answer. He left me saying that he would see me again the next day. But the next day I went away. I would not remain in the house with Lady Ball after what she had believed about me. She took that other man's part against me, and therefore I went away."

"Did he say anything as to your going?"

"He begged me to stay, but I would not stay. I thought it was all over then. I regarded him as being quite free from any engagement, and myself as being free from any necessity of obeying him. And it was all over. I had no right to think anything else."

"And what came next?"

"Nothing. Nothing else has happened, except that Lady Ball came to me in Arundel Street, asking me to renounce him."

"And you refused?"

"Yes; I would do nothing at her bidding. Why should I? She had been my enemy throughout, since she found that the money belonged to her son and not to me."

"And all this time you have seen him frequently?"

"I have seen him sometimes about the business."

"And he has never said a word to you about your engagement to him?"

"Never a word."

"Nor you to him?"

"Oh, no! how could I speak to him about it?"

"I would have done so. I would not have had my heart crushed within me. But perhaps you were right. Perhaps it was best to be patient."

"I know that I have been wrong to expect anything or to hope for anything," said Margaret. "What right have I to hope for anything when I refused him while I was rich?"

"That has nothing to do with it."

"When he asked me again, he only did it because he pitied me. I don't want to be any man's wife because he pities me."

"But you accepted him."

"Yes; because I loved him."

"And now?" Again Miss Mackenzie, sat

silent, still moving her fingers among the locks upon her brow. "And now, Margaret?" repeated Mrs. Mackenzie.

"What's the use of it now?"

"But you do love him?"

"Of course I love him. How should it be otherwise? What has he done to change my love? His feelings have changed, and I have no right to blame him. He has changed; and I hate myself, because I feel that in coming here I have, as it were, run after him. I should have put myself in some place where no thought of marrying him should ever have come again to me."

"Margaret, you are wrong throughout."

"Am I? Everybody always says that I am always wrong."

"If I can understand anything of the matter, Sir John Ball has not changed."

"Then, why—why—why—?"

"Ah, yes, exactly; why? Why is it that men and women cannot always understand each other; that they will remain for hours in each other's presence without the power of expressing, by a single word, the thoughts that are busy within them? Who can say why it is so? Can you get up and make a clean breast of it all to him?"

"But I am a woman, and am very poor."

"Yes, and he is a man; and, like most men, very dumb when they have anything at heart which requires care in the speaking. He knows no better than to let things be as they are; to leave the words all unspoken till he can say to you, 'Now is the time for us to go and get ourselves married;' just as he might tell you that now was the time to go and dine."

"But will he ever say that?"

"Of course he will. If he does not say so when all this business is off his mind, when Mr. Maguire and his charges are put at rest, when the lawyers have finished their work, then come to me and tell me that I have deceived you. Say to me then, 'Clara Mackenzie, you have put me wrong, and I look to you to put me right.' You will find I will put you right."

In answer to this, Margaret was able to say nothing further. She sat for a while with her face buried in her hands thinking of it all, asking herself whether she might dare to believe it all. At last, however, she went up to dress for dinner; and when she came down to the drawing-room there was a smile upon her face.

After that a month or six weeks passed in Cavendish Square, and there was, during all that time, no further special reference to Sir John Ball or his affairs. Twice he was asked to dine with the Mackenzies, and on both occasions

he did so. On neither of those evenings did he say very much to Margaret; but, on both of them he said some few words, and it was manifestly his desire that they should be regarded as friends.

And as the spring came on, Margaret's patience returned to her, and her spirits were higher than they had been at any time since she first discovered that success among the Stumfoldians at Littlebath did not make her happy.

CHAPTER XII.

THE NEGRO SOLDIERS' ORPHAN BAZAAR.

In the spring days of the early May there came up in London that year a great bazaar,—a great charity bazaar on behalf of the orphan children of negro soldiers who had fallen in the American war. Tidings had come to this country that all slaves taken in the revolted States had been made free by the Northern invaders, and that these free men had been called upon to show their immediate gratitude by becoming soldiers in the Northern ranks. As soldiers they were killed in battle, or died, and as dead men they left orphans behind them. Information had come that many of these orphans were starving, and hence had arisen the cause for the Negro Soldiers' Orphan Bazaar. There was still in existence at that time, down at South Kensington, some remaining court or outstanding building which had belonged to the Great International

Exhibition, and here the bazaar was to be held. I do not know that I can trace the way in which the idea grew and became great, or that any one at the time was able to attribute the honour to the proper founder. Some gave it all to the Prince of Wales, declaring that his royal highness had done it out of his own head; and others were sure that the whole business had originated with a certain philanthropical Mr. Manfred Smith who had lately come up in the world, and was supposed to have a great deal to do with most things. Be that as it may, this thing did grow and become great, and there was a list of lady patronesses which included some duchesses, one marchioness, and half the countesses in London. It was soon manifest to the eyes of those who understood such things, that the Negro Soldiers' Orphan Bazaar was to be a success, and therefore there was no difficulty whatsoever in putting the custody of the stalls into the hands of proper persons. The difficulty consisted in rejecting offers from persons who undoubtedly were quite proper for such an occasion. There came to be interest made for permission to serve, and boastings were heard of unparalleled success in the bazaar line. The Duchess of St. Bungay had a happy bevy of young ladies who were to act as counter attendants under her grace; and who so happy as any young lady who could get herself

put upon the duchess's staff? It was even rumoured that a certain very distinguished person would have shown herself behind a stall, had not a certain other more distinguished person expressed an objection; and while the rumour was afloat as to the junior of those two distinguished persons, the young-ladydom of London was frantic in its eagerness to officiate. Now at that time there had become attached to the name of our poor Griselda a romance with which the west-end of London had become wonderfully well acquainted. The story of the Lion and the Lamb was very popular. Mr. Maguire may be said to have made himself odious to the fashionable world at large, and the fate of poor Margaret Mackenzie with her lost fortune, and the additional misfortune of her clerical pledged protector, had recommended itself as being truly interesting to all the feeling hearts of the season. Before May was over, gentlemen were enticed to dinner parties by being told,—and untruly told,—that the Lamb had been "secured;" as on the previous year they had been enticed by a similar assurance as to Bishop Colenso; and when Margaret on one occasion allowed herself to be taken to Covent Garden Theatre, every face from the stalls was turned towards her between the acts.

Who then was more fit to take a stall, or part of a stall at the Negro Soldiers' Orphan Bazaar,

than our Griselda? When the thing loomed so large, lady patronesses began to be aware that mere nobodies would hardly be fit for the work. There would have been little or no difficulty in carrying out a law that no lady should take a part in the business who had not some handle to her name, but it was felt that such an arrangement as that might lead to failure rather than glory. The commoner world must be represented, but it should be represented only by ladies who had made great names for themselves. Mrs. Conway Sparkes, the spiteful poetess, though she was old and ugly as well as spiteful, was to have a stall and a bevy, because there was thought to be no doubt about her poetry. Mrs. Chaucer Munro had a stall and a bevy; but I cannot clearly tell her claim to distinction, unless it was that she had all but lost her character four times, but had so saved it on each of those occasions that she was just not put into the Index Expurgatorius of fashionable society in London. It was generally said by those young men who discussed the subject, that among Mrs. Chaucer Munro's bevy would be found the most lucrative fascination of the day. And then Mrs. Mackenzie was asked to take a stall, or part of a stall, and to bring Griselda with her as her assistant. By this time the Lamb was most generally known as "Griselda" among fashionable people.

Now Mrs. Mackenzie was herself a woman of fashion, and quite open to the distinction of having a part assigned to her at the great bazaar of the season. She did not at all object to a booth on the left hand of the Duchess of St. Bungay, although it was just opposite to Mrs. Chaucer Munro. She assented at once.

"But you must positively bring Griselda," said Lady Glencora Palliser, by whom the business of this mission was conducted.

"Of course, I understand that," said Mrs. Mackenzie. "But what if she won't come?"

"Griseldas are made to do anything," said Lady Glencora, "and of course she must come."

Having settled the difficulty in this way, Lady Glencora went her way, and Mrs. Mackenzie did not allow Griselda to go to her rest that night till she had extracted from her a promise of acquiescence, which, I think, never would have been given had Miss Mackenzie understood anything of the circumstances under which her presence was desired.

But the promise was given, and Margaret knew little or nothing of what was expected from her till there came up, about a fortnight before the day of the bazaar, the great question of her dress for the occasion. Previous to that she would fain have been energetic in collecting and making things for sale at her stall, for she

really taught herself to be anxious that the negro soldiers' orphans should have provision made for them; but, alas! her energy was all repressed, and she found that she was not to be allowed to do anything in that direction.

"Things of that sort would not go down at all now-a-days, Margaret," said Mrs. Mackenzie. "Nobody would trouble themselves to carry them away. There are tradesmen who furnish the stalls, and mark their own prices, and take back what is not sold. You charge double the tradesman's price, that's all."

Margaret, when her eyes were thus opened, of course ceased to make little pincushions, but she felt that her interest in the thing was very much lowered. But a word must be said as to that question of the dress. Miss Mackenzie, when she was first interrogated as to her intentions, declared her purpose of wearing a certain black silk dress which had seen every party at Mrs. Stumfold's during Margaret's Littlebath season. To this her cousin demurred, and from demurring proceeded to the enunciation of a positive order. The black silk dress in question should not be worn. Now Miss Mackenzie chose to be still in mourning on the second of June, the day of the bazaar, her brother having died in September, and had no fitting garment, so she said, other than the black silk in question. Whereupon

Mrs. Mackenzie, without further speech to her cousin on the subject, went out and purchased a muslin covered all over with the prettiest little frecks of black, and sent a milliner to Margaret, and provided a bonnet of much the same pattern, the gayest, lightest, jauntiest, falsest, most make-belief-mourning bonnet that ever sprang from the art of a designer in bonnets,—and thus nearly broke poor Margaret's heart.

"People should never have things given them, who can't buy them themselves," she said, with tears in her eyes, "because of course they know what it means."

"But, my dearest," said Mrs. Mackenzie, "young ladies who never have any money of their own at all always accept presents from all their relations. It is their special privilege."

"Oh, yes, young ladies; but not women like me who are waiting to find out whether they are ruined or not."

The difficulty, however, was at last overcome, and Margaret, with many inward upbraidings of her conscience, consented to wear the black-freckled dress.

"I never saw anybody look so altered in my life," said Mrs. Mackenzie, when Margaret, apparelled, appeared in the Cavendish Square drawing-room on the morning in question. "Oh,

dear, I hope Sir John Ball will come to look at you."

"Nonsense; he won't be such a fool as to do anything of the kind."

"I took care to let him know that you would be there," said Mrs. Mackenzie.

"You didn't?"

"But I did, my dear."

"Oh, dear, what will he think of me?" ejaculated Margaret; but nevertheless I fancy that there must have been some elation in her bosom when she regarded herself and the freckled muslin in the glass.

Both Mrs. Mackenzie and Miss Mackenzie had more than once gone down to the place to inspect the ground and make themselves familiar with the position they were to take. There were great stalls and little stalls, which came alternately; and the Mackenzie stall stood next to a huge centre booth at which the duchess was to preside. On their other hand was the stall of old Lady Ware, and opposite to them, as has before been said, the doubtful Mrs. Chaucer Munro was to hold difficult sway over her bevy of loud nymphs. Together with Mrs. Mackenzie were two other Miss Mackenzies, sisters of her husband, handsome, middle-aged women, with high cheek-bones and fine brave-looking eyes. All the Mackenzies, except our Griselda, were dressed

in the tartan of their clan; and over the stall there was some motto in Gaelic, "Dhu dhaith donald dhuth," which nobody could understand, but which was not the less expressive. Indeed the Mackenzie stall was got up very well; but then was it not known and understood that Mrs. Mackenzie did get up things very well? It was acknowledged on all sides that the Lamb, Griselda, was uncommonly well got up on this occasion.

It was understood that the ladies were to be assembled in the bazaar at half-past two, and that the doors were to be thrown open to the public at three o'clock. Soon after half-past two Mrs. Mackenzie's carriage was at the door, and, the other Mackenzies having come up at the same time, the Mackenzie phalanx entered the building together. There were many others with them, but as they walked up they found the Countess of Ware standing alone in the centre building, with her four daughters behind her. She had on her head a wonderful tiara which gave to her appearance a ferocity almost greater than was natural to her. She was a woman with square jaws, and a big face, and stout shoulders; but she was not, of her own unassisted height, very tall. But of that tiara and its altitude she was proud, and as she stood in the midst of the stalls, brandishing her

umbrella-sized parasol in her anger, the ladies, as they entered, might well be cowed by her presence.

"When ladies say half-past two," said she, "they ought to come at half-past two. Where is the Duchess of St. Bungay? I shall not wait for her."

But there was a lady there who had come in behind the Mackenzies, whom nothing ever cowed. This was the Lady Glencora Palliser, the great heiress who had married the heir of a great duke, pretty, saucy, and occasionally intemperate, in whose eyes Lady Ware with her ferocious tiara was simply an old woman in a ridiculous head-gear. The countess had apparently addressed herself to Mrs. Mackenzie, who had been the foremost to enter the building, and our Margaret had already begun to tremble. But Lady Glencora stept forward, and took the brunt of the battle upon herself.

"Nobody ever yet was so punctual as my Lady Ware," said Lady Glencora.

"It is very annoying to be kept waiting on such occasions," said the countess.

"But, my dear Lady Ware, who keeps you waiting? There is your stall, and why on earth should you stand here and call us all over as we come in, like naughty schoolboys?"

"The duchess said expressly that she would be here at half-past two."

"Who ever expects the dear duchess to keep her word?" said Lady Glencora.

"Or whoever cared whether she does or does not?" said Mrs. Chaucer Munro, who, with her peculiar bevy, had now made her way up among the front rank.

Then to have seen the tiara of Lady Ware, as it wagged and nodded while she looked at Mrs. Munro, and to have witnessed the high moral tone of the ferocity with which she stalked away to her own stall with her daughters behind her, —a tragi-comedy which it was given to no male eyes to behold,—would have been worth the whole after-performance of the bazaar. No male eyes beheld that scene, as Mr. Manfred Smith, the manager, had gone out to look for his duchess, and missing her carriage in the crowd, did not return till the bazaar had been opened. That Mrs. Chaucer Munro did not sink, collapsed, among her bevy, must have been owing altogether to that callousness which a long habit of endurance produces. Probably she did feel something as at the moment there came no titter from any other bevy corresponding to the titter which was raised by her own. She and her bevy retired to their allotted place, conscious that their time for glory could not come till the male world should appear upon the scene. But Lady Ware's tiara still wagged and nodded behind her coun-

ter, and Margaret, looking at her, thought that she must have come there as the grand duenna of the occasion.

Just at three o'clock the poor duchess hurried into the building in a terrible flurry, and went hither and thither among the stalls, not knowing at first where was her throne. Unkind chance threw her at first almost into the booth of Mrs. Conway Sparkes, the woman whom of all women she hated the most; and from thence she recoiled into the arms of Lady Hartletop, who was sitting serene, placid, and contented in her appointed place.

"Opposite, I think, duchess," Mrs. Conway Sparkes had said. "We are only the small fry here."

"Oh, ah; I beg pardon. They told me the middle, to the left."

"And this is the middle to the right," said Mrs. Conway Sparkes. But the duchess had turned round since she came in, and could not at all understand where she was.

"Under the canopy, duchess," just whispered Lady Hartletop. Lady Hartletop was a young woman who knew her right hand from her left under all circumstances of life, and who never made any mistakes. The duchess looked up in her confusion to the centre of the ceiling, but could see no canopy. Lady Hartletop had done

all that could be required of her, and if the duchess were to die amidst her difficulties it would not be her fault. Then came forth the Lady Glencora, and with true charity conducted the lady-president to her chair, just in time to avoid the crush which ensued upon the opening of the doors.

The doors were opened, and very speedily the space of the bazaar between the stalls became too crowded to have admitted the safe passage of such a woman as the Duchess of St. Bungay; but Lady Glencora, who was less majestic in her size and gait, did not find herself embarrassed. And now there arose, before the general work of fleecing the wether lambs had well commenced, a terrible discord, as of a brass band with broken bassoons, and trumpets all out of order, from the further end of the building,—a terrible noise of most unmusical music, such as Bartholomew Fair in its loudest days could hardly have known. At such a diapason one would have thought that the tender ears of May Fair and Belgravia would have been crushed and cracked and riven asunder; that female voices would have shrieked, and the intensity of fashionable female agony would have displayed itself in all its best recognized forms. But the crash of brass was borne by them as though they had been rough schoolboys delighting in a din.

The duchess gave one jump, and then remained quiet and undismayed. If Lady Hartletop heard it, she did not betray the hearing. Lady Glencora for a moment put her hands to her ears as she laughed, but she did it as though the prettiness of the motion were its only one cause. The fine nerves of Mrs. Conway Sparkes, the poetess, bore it all without flinching; and Mrs. Chaucer Munro with her bevy rushed forward so that they might lose nothing of what was coming.

"What are they going to do?" said Margaret to her cousin, in alarm.

"It's the play part of the thing. Have you not seen the bills?" Then Margaret looked at a great placard which was exhibited near to her, which, though by no means intelligible to her, gave her to understand that there was a show in progress. The wit of the thing seemed to consist chiefly in the wonderful names chosen. The King of the Cannibal Islands was to appear on a white charger. King Chrononhotonthologos was to be led in chains by Tom Thumb. Achilles would drag Hector thrice round the walls of Troy; and Queen Godiva would ride through Coventry, accompanied by Lord Burghley and the ambassador from Japan. It was also signified that in some back part of the premises a theatrical entertainment would be carried on throughout the afternoon, the King of the Can-

nibal Islands, with his royal brother and sister Chrononhotonthologos and Godiva, taking principal parts; but as nobody seemed to go to the theatre the performers spent their time chiefly in making processions through and amidst the stalls, when, as the day waxed hot, and the work became heavy, they seemed to be taken much in dudgeon by the various bevies with whose business they interfered materially.

On this, their opening march, they rushed into the bazaar with great energy, and though they bore no resemblance to the characters named in the playbill, and though there was among them neither a Godiva, a Hector, a Tom Thumb, or a Japanese, nevertheless, as they were dressed in paint and armour after the manner of the late Mr. Richardson's heroes, and as most of the ladies had probably been without previous opportunity of seeing such delights, they had their effect. When they had made their twenty-first procession the thing certainly grew stale, and as they brought with them an infinity of dirt, they were no doubt a nuisance. But no one would have been inclined to judge these amateur actors with harshness who knew how much they themselves were called on to endure, who could appreciate the disgusting misery of a hot summer afternoon spent beneath dust and paint and tin-plate armour, and who would re-

member that the performers received payment neither in eclat nor in thanks, nor even in the smiles of beauty.

"Can't somebody tell them not to come any more?" said the duchess, almost crying with vexation towards the end of the afternoon.

Then Mr. Manfred Smith, who managed everything, went to the rear, and the king and warriors were sent away to get beer or cooling drinks at their respective clubs.

Poor Mr. Manfred Smith! He had not been present at the moment in which he was wanted to lead the duchess to her stall, and the duchess never forgave him. Instead of calling him by his name from time to time, and enabling him to shine in public as he deserved to shine,—for he had worked at the bazaar for the last six weeks as no professional man ever worked at his profession,—the duchess always asked for "somebody" when she wanted Mr. Smith, and treated him when he came as though he had been a servant hired for the occasion. One very difficult job of work was given to him before the day was done; "I wish you'd go over to those young women," said the duchess, "and say that if they make so much noise, I must go away."

The young women in question were Mrs. Chaucer Munro and her bevy, and the commis-

sion was one which poor Manfred Smith found it difficult to execute.

"Mrs. Munro," said he, "you'll be sorry to hear—that the duchess—has got—a headache, and she thinks we all might be a little quieter."

The shouts of the loud nymphs were by this time high. "Pooh!" said one of them. "Headache indeed!" said another. "Bother her head!" said a third! "If the duchess is ill, perhaps she had better retire," said Mrs. Chaucer Munro. Then Mr. Manfred Smith walked off sorrowfully towards the door, and seating himself on the stool of the money-taker by the entrance, wiped off the perspiration from his brow. He had already put on his third pair of yellow kid gloves for the occasion, and they were soiled and torn and disreputable; his polished boots were brown with dust; the magenta ribbon round his neck had become a moist rope; his hat had been thrown down and rumpled; a drop of oil had made a spot upon his trousers; his whiskers were draggled and out of order, and his mouth was full of dirt. I doubt if Mr. Manfred Smith will ever undertake to manage another bazaar.

The duchess I think was right in her endeavour to mitigate the riot among Mrs. Munro's nymphs. Indeed there was rioting among other nymphs than hers, though her noise and their noise was the loudest; and it was difficult to say

how there should not be riot, seeing what was to be the recognised manner of transacting business. At first there was something of prettiness in the rioting. The girls, who went about among the crowd, begging men to put their hands into lucky bags, trading in rose-buds, and asking for half-crowns for cigar lighters, were fresh in their muslins, pretty with their braided locks, and perhaps not impudently over-pressing in their solicitations to male strangers. While they were not as yet either aweary or habituated to the necessity of importunity, they remembered their girlhood and their ladyhood, their youth and their modesty, and still carried with them something of the bashfulness of maidenhood; and the young men, the wether lambs, were as yet flush with their half-crowns, and the elder sheep had not quite dispensed the last of their sovereigns or buttoned up their trousers pockets. But as the work went on, and the dust arose, and the prettinesses were destroyed, and money became scarce, and weariness was felt, and the heat showed itself, and the muslins sank into limpness, and the ribbons lost their freshness, and braids of hair grew rough and loose, and sidelocks displaced themselves,—as girls became used to soliciting, and frogetful of their usual reticences in their anxiety for money, the charm of the thing went, and all was ugliness

and rapacity. Young ladies no longer moved about, doing works of charity; but harpies and unclean birds were greedy in quest of their prey.

"Put a letter in my post-office," said one of Mrs. Munro's bevy, who officiated in a postal capacity behind a little square hole, to a young man on whom she pounced out and had caught him and brought up, almost with violence.

The young man tendered some scrap of paper and a sixpence.

"Only sixpence!" said the girl.

A cabman could not have made the complaint with a more finished accent of rapacious disgust.

"Never mind," said the girl, "I'll give you an answer."

Then, with inky fingers and dirty hand, she tendered him some scrawl, and demanded five shillings postage.

"Five shillings!" said the young man. "Oh, I'm d——."

Then he gave her a shilling and walked away. She ventured to give one little halloa after him, but she caught the duchess's eye looking at her, and was quiet.

I don't think there was much real flirting done. Men won't flirt with draggled girls, smirched with dust, weary with work, and soiled with heat; and especially they will not

do so at the rate of a shilling a word. When the whole thing was over, Mrs. Chaucer Munro's bevy, lying about on the benches in fatigue before they went away, declared that, as far as they were concerned, the thing was a mistake. The expenditure in gloves and muslin had been considerable, and the returns to them had been very small. It is not only that men will not flirt with draggled girls, but they will carry away with them unfortunate remembrances of what they have seen and heard. Upon the whole it may be doubted whether any of the bevies were altogether contented with their operations on the occasion of the Negro Soldiers' Orphan Bazaar.

Miss Mackenzie had been, perhaps, more fortunate than some of the others. It must, however, be remembered that there are two modes of conducting business at these bazaars. There is the travelling merchant, who roams about, and there is the stationary merchant, who remains always behind her counter. It is not to be supposed that the Duchess of St. Bungay spent the afternoon rushing about with a lucky bag. The Duchess was a stationary trader, and so were all the ladies who belonged to the Mackenzie booth. Miss Mackenzie, the lamb, had been much regarded, and consequently the things at her disposal had been quickly sold.

It had all seemed to her to be very wonderful, and as the fun grew fast and furious, as the young girls became eager in their attacks, she made up her mind that she would never occupy another stall at a bazaar. One incident, and but one, occurred to her during the day; and one person came to her that she knew, and but one. It was nearly six, and she was beginning to think that the weary work must soon be over, when, on a sudden, she found Sir John Ball standing beside her.

"Oh, John!" she said, startled by his presence, "who would have thought of seeing you here?"

"And why not me as well as any other fool of my age?"

"Because you think it's foolish," she answered, "and I suppose the others don't."

"Why should you say that I think it foolish? At any rate, I'm glad to see you looking so nice and happy."

"I don't know about being happy," said Margaret,—"or nice either for the matter of that."

But there was a smile on her face as she spoke, and Sir John smiled also when he saw it.

"Doesn't she look well in that bonnet?" said Mrs. Mackenzie, turning round to the side of the counter at which he was standing. "It was my choice, and I absolutely made her wear it. If you knew the trouble I had!"

"It is very pretty," said Sir John.

"Is it not? And are you not very much obliged to me? I'm sure you ought to be, for nobody before has ever taken the trouble of finding out what becomes her most. As for herself, she's much too well-behaved a young woman to think of such vanities."

"Not at present certainly," said Margaret.

"And why not at present? She looks on those lawyers and their work as though there was something funereal about them. You ought to teach her better, Sir John."

"All that will be over in a day or two now," said he.

"And then she'll shake off her dowdiness and her gloom together," said Mrs. Mackenzie. "Do you know I fancy she has a liking for pretty things at heart as well as another woman."

"I hope she has," said he.

"Of course you do. What is a woman worth without it? Don't be angry, Margaret, but I say a woman is worth nothing without it, and Sir John will agree with me if he knows anything about the matter. But, Margaret, why don't you make him buy something? He can't refuse you if you ask him."

If Miss Mackenzie could thereby have provided for all the negro soldiers' orphans in existence, I do not think that she could at

that moment have solicited him to make a purchase.

"Come, Sir John," continued Mrs. Mackenzie, "you must buy something of her. What do you say to this paper-knife?"

"How much does the paper-knife cost?" said he, still smiling. It was a large, elaborate, and perhaps, I may say, unwieldy affair, with a great elephant at the end of it.

"Oh! that is terribly dear," said Margaret, "it costs two pounds ten."

Thereupon he put his hand into his pocket, and taking out his purse, gave her a five-pound note.

"We never give change," said Mrs. Mackenzie; "do we, Margaret?"

"I'll give him change," said Margaret.

"I'll be extravagant for once," said Sir John, "and let you keep the whole."

"Oh, John!" said Margaret.

"You have no right to scold him yet," said Mrs. Mackenzie.

Margaret, when she heard this, blushed up to her forehead, and in her confusion forgot all about the paper-knife and the money. Sir John, I fancy, was almost as much confused himself, and was quite unable to make any fitting reply. But, just at that moment, there came across two harpies from the realms of Mrs. Chaucer Munro, eagerly intent upon their prey.

"Here are the lion and the lamb together," said one harpy. "The lion must buy a rose to give to the lamb. Sir Lion, the rose is but a poor half-crown." And she tendered him a battered flower, leering at him from beneath her draggled, dusty bonnet as she put forth her untempting hand for the money.

"Sir Lion, Sir Lion," said the other harpy, "I want your name for a raffle."

But the lion was off, having pushed the first harpy aside somewhat rudely. That tale of the lion and the lamb had been very terrible to him; but never till this occasion had any one dared to speak of it directly to his face. But what will not a harpy do who has become wild and dirty and disgusting in the pursuit of half-crowns?"

"Now he is angry," said Margaret. "Oh, Mrs. Mackenzie, why did you say that?"

"Yes; he is angry," said Mrs. Mackenzie, "but not with you or me. Upon my word, I thought he would have pushed that girl over; and if he had, he would only have served her right."

"But why did you say that? You shouldn't have said it."

"About your not scolding him yet? I said it, my dear, because I wanted to make myself certain. I was almost certain before, but now I am quite certain."

"Certain of what, Mrs. Mackenzie?"

"That you'll be a baronet's wife before me, and entitled to be taken out of a room first as long as dear old Sir Walter is alive."

Soon after that the bazaar was brought to an end, and it was supposed to have been the most successful thing of the kind ever done in London. Loud boasts were made that more than eight hundred pounds had been cleared; but whether any orphans of any negro soldiers were ever the better for the money I am not able to say.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHOWING HOW THE LION WAS STUNG BY THE WASP.

It may be remembered that Mr. Maguire, when he first made public that pretty story of the Lion and the Lamb, declared that he would give the lion no peace till that beast had disgorged his prey, and that he had pledged himself to continue the fight till he should have succeeded in bringing the lamb back to the pleasant pastures of Littlebath. But Mr. Maguire found some difficulty in carrying out his pledge. He was willing enough to fight, but the weapons with which to do battle were wanting to him. The Christian Examiner, having got so far into the mess, and finding that a ready sale did in truth result from any special article as to the lion and the lamb, was indeed ready to go on with the libel. The Christian Examiner probably had not much to lose. But there arose a question

whether fighting simply through the columns of the Christian Examiner was not almost tantamount to no fight at all. He wanted to bring an action against Sir John Ball, to have Sir John Ball summoned into court and examined about the money, to hear some truculent barrister tell Sir John Ball that he could not conceal himself from the scorn of an indignant public behind the spangles of his parvenu baronetcy. He had a feeling that the lion would be torn to pieces, if only a properly truculent barrister could be got to fix his claws into him. But unfortunately no lawyer,—not even Solomon Walker, the Low Church attorney at Littlebath, —would advise him that he had any ground for an action. If indeed he chose to proceed against the lady for a breach of promise of marriage, then the result would depend on the evidence. In such case as that the Low Church attorney at Littlebath was willing to take the matter up. "But Mr. Maguire was, of course, aware," said Solomon Walker, "that there was a prejudice in the public mind against gentlemen appearing as parties to such suits." Mr. Maguire was also aware that he could adduce no evidence to the fact beyond his own unsupported, and, in such case, untrue word, and declared therefore to the attorney, in a very high tone indeed, that on no account would he take any step to harass the

lady. It was simply against Sir John Ball that he wished to proceed. "Things would come out in that trial, Mr. Walker," he said, "which would astonish you and all the legal world. A rapacious scheme of villany has been conceived and brought to bear, through the stupidity of some people and the iniquity of others, which would unroll itself fold by fold as certainly as I stand here, if it were properly handled by a competent barrister in one of our courts of law." And I think that Mr. Maguire believed what he was saying, and that he believed, moreover, that he was speaking the truth when he told Mr. Walker that the lady had promised to marry him. Men who can succeed in deceiving no one else will succeed at last in deceiving themselves. But the lawyer told him, repeating the fact over and over again, that the thing was impracticable; that there was no means of carrying the matter so far that Sir John Ball should be made to appear in a witness-box. Everything that Sir John had done he had done legally; and even at that moment of the discussion between Mr. Walker and Mr. Maguire, the question of the ownership of the property was being tried before a proper tribunal in London. Mr. Maguire still thought Mr. Walker to be wrong,—thought that his attorney was a weak and ignorant man; but he acknowledged to himself the fact that he in his unhappy

position was unable to get any more cunning attorney to take the matter in hand.

But the Christian Examiner still remained to him, and that he used with diligence. From week to week there appeared in it articles attacking the lion, stating that the lion was still being watched, that his prey would be snatched from him at last, that the lamb should even yet have her rights, and the like. And as the thing went on, the periodical itself and the writer of the article became courageous by habit, till things were printed which Sir John Ball found it almost impossible to bear. It was declared that he was going to desert the lamb, now that he had taken all the lamb's property; and that the lamb, shorn of all her fleece, was to be condemned to earn her bread as a common nurse in the wards of a common hospital,—all which information came readily enough to Mr. Maguire by the hands of Miss Colza. The papers containing these articles were always sent to Sir John Ball and to Miss Mackenzie, and the articles were always headed, "The Lion and the Lamb." Miss Mackenzie, in accordance with an arrangement made to that purpose, sent the papers as soon as they came to Mr. Slow, but Sir John Ball had no such ready way of freeing himself from their burden. He groaned and toiled under them, going to his lawyer with them, and imploring permission to

bring an action for libel against Mr. Maguire. The venom of the unclean animal's sting had gone so deep into him, that, fond as he was of money, he had told his lawyer that he would not begrudge the expense if he could only punish the man who was hurting him. But the attorney, who understood something of feeling as well as something of money, begged him to be quiet at any rate till the fate of the property should be settled. "And if you'll take my advice, Sir John, you will not notice him at all. You may be sure that he has not a shilling in the world, and that he wants you to prosecute him. When you have got damages against him, he will be off out of the country." "But I shall have stopped his impudent ribaldry," said Sir John Ball. Then the lawyer tried to explain to him that no one read the ribaldry. It was of no use. Sir John read it himself, and that was enough to make him wretched.

The little fable which made Sir John so unhappy, had not, for some months past, appeared in any of the metropolitan newspapers; but when the legal inquiry into the proper disposition of Mr. Jonathan Ball's property was over, and when it was known that, as the result of that inquiry, the will in favour of the Mackenzies was to be set aside and the remains of the property handed over to Sir John, then that

very influential newspaper, which in the early days of the question had told the story of the Lion and the Lamb, told it all again, tearing, indeed, the Littlebath Christian Examiner into shreds for its iniquity, but speaking of the romantic misfortune of the lamb in terms which made Sir John Ball very unhappy. The fame which accrued to him from being so publicly pointed out as a lion, was not fame of which he was proud. And when the writer in this very influential newspaper went on to say that the world was now looking for a termination to this wonderful story which would make it pleasant to all parties, he was nearly beside himself in his misery. He, a man of fifty, of slow habits, with none of the buoyancy of youth left in him, apt to regard himself as older than his age, who had lived with his father and mother almost on an equality in regard to habits of life, the father of a large family, of which the eldest was now himself a man!—Could it be endured that such a one as he should enter upon matrimony amidst the din of public trumpets and under a halo of romance? The idea of it was frightful to him. On the very day on which the result of the legal investigation was officially communicated to him, he sat in the old study at the Cedars with two newspapers before him. In one of these there was a description of his love, which he knew

was intended as furtive ridicule, and an assurance to the public that the lamb's misfortunes would all be remedied by the sweet music of the marriage bell. What right had any one to assert publicly that he intended to marry any one? In his wretchedness and anger he would have indicted this newspaper also for a libel, had not his lawyer assured him that, according to law, there was no libel in stating that a man was going to be married. The other paper accused him of rapacity and dishonesty in that he would not marry the lamb, now that he had secured the lamb's fleece; so that, in truth, he had no escape on either side; for Mr. Maguire, having at last ascertained that the lamb had, in very truth, lost all her fleece, was no longer desirous of any personal connection, and felt that he could best carry out his pledge by attacking the possessor of the fleece on that side. Under such circumstances, what was such a man as Sir John Ball to do? Could he marry his cousin amidst the trumpets, and the halo, and the doggrel poetry which would abound? Was it right that he should be made a mark for the finger of scorn? Had he done anything to deserve this punishment?

And it must be remembered that from day to day his own mother, who lived with him, who sat with him late every night talking on this

one subject, was always instigating him to abandon his cousin. It had been admitted between them that he was no longer bound by his offer. Margaret herself had admitted it,—"does not attempt to deny it," as Lady Ball repeated over and over again. When he had made his offer he had known nothing of Mr. Maguire's offer, nor had Margaret then told him of it. Such reticence on her part of course released him from his bond. So Lady Ball argued, and against this argument her son made no demur. Indeed it was hardly possible that he should comprehend exactly what had taken place between his cousin and Mr. Maguire. His mother did not scruple to assure him that she must undoubtedly at one time have accepted the man's proposal. In answer to this John Ball would always assert his entire reliance on his cousin's word.

"She did it without knowing that she did so," Lady Ball would answer; "but in some language she must have assented."

But the mother was never able to extract from the son any intimation of his intention to give up the marriage, though she used threats and tears, ridicule and argument,—appeals to his pride and appeals to his pocket. He never said that he certainly would marry her; he never said so at least after that night on which Mar-

garet, in her bedroom, had told him her story with reference to Mr. Maguire; but neither did he ever say that he certainly would not marry her. Lady Ball gathered from all his words a conviction that he would be glad to be released, if he could be released by any act on Margaret's behalf, and therefore she had made her attempt on Margaret. With what success the reader will, I hope, remember. Margaret, when she accepted her cousin's offer, had been specially bidden by him to be firm. This bidding she obeyed, and on that side there was no hope at all for Lady Ball.

I fear there was much of cowardice on Sir John's part. He had, in truth, forgiven Margaret any offence that she had committed in reference to Mr. Maguire. She had accepted his offer while another offer was still dragging on an existence after a sort, and she had not herself been the first to tell him of these circumstances. There had been offence to him in this, but that offence he had, in truth, forgiven. Had there been no Littlebath Christian Examiner, no tale of the Lion and the Lamb, no publicity and no ridicule, he would quietly have walked off with his cousin to some church, having gone through all preliminary ceremonies in the most silent manner possible for them, and would have quietly got himself married and have carried

Margaret home with him. Now that his father was dead and that his uncle Jonathan's money had come to him, his pecuniary cares were comparatively light, and he believed that he could be very happy with Margaret and his children. But then to be pointed at daily as a lion, and to be asked by all his acquaintance after the lamb! It must be owned that he was a coward; but are not most men cowards in such matters as that?

But now the trial was over, the money was his own, Margaret was left without a shilling in the world, and it was quite necessary that he should make up his mind. He had once told his lawyer, in his premature joy, on that very day on which Mr. Maguire had come to the Cedars, that everything was to be made smooth by a marriage between himself and the disinherited heiress. He had since told the lawyer that something had occurred which might, perhaps, alter this arrangement. After that the lawyer had asked no question about the marriage; but when he communicated to his client the final intelligence that Jonathan Ball's money was at his client's disposal, he said that it would be well to arrange what should be done on Miss Mackenzie's behalf.

Sir John Ball had assumed very plainly a look of vexation when the question was put to him.

"I promised Mr. Slow that I would ask you," said the lawyer. "Mr. Slow is of course anxious for his client."

"It is my business and not Mr. Slow's," said Sir John Ball, "and you may tell him that I say so."

Then there had been a moment's silence, and Sir John had felt himself to be wrong.

"Pray tell him also," said Sir John, "that I am very grateful to him for his solicitude about my cousin, and that I fully appreciate his admirable conduct both to her and me throughout all this affair. When I have made up my mind what shall be done, I will let him know at once."

As he walked down from his lawyer's chambers in Bedford Row to the railway station, he thought of all this, and thought also of those words which Mrs. Mackenzie had spoken to him in the bazaar. "You have no right to scold him yet," she had said to Margaret. Of course he had understood what they meant, and of course Margaret had understood them also. And he had not been at all angry when they were spoken. Margaret had been so prettily dressed, and had looked so fresh and nice, that at that moment he had forgotten all his annoyances in his admiration, and had listened to Mrs. Mackenzie's cunning speech, not without confusion, but without any immediate desire to contradict its necessary

inference. A moment or two afterwards the harpies had been upon him, and then he had gone off in his anger. Poor Margaret had been unable to distinguish between the effects produced by the speech and by the harpies; but Mrs. Mackenzie had been more clever, and had consequently predicted her cousin's speedy promotion in the world's rank.

Sir John, as he went home, made up his mind to one of two alternatives. He would either marry his cousin or halve Jonathan Ball's money with her. He wanted to marry her, and he wanted to keep the money. He wanted to marry her especially since he had seen how nice she looked in black-freckled muslin; but he wanted to marry her in silence, without any clash of absurd trumpets, without ridicule-moving leading articles, and fingers pointed at the triumphant lion. He made up his mind to one of those alternatives, and resolved that he would settle which on that very night. His mind should be made up and told to his mother before he went to bed. Nevertheless, when the girls and Jack were gone, and he was left alone with Lady Ball, his mind had as yet been made up to nothing!

His mother gave him no peace on this subject. It was she who began the conversation on this occasion.

"John," she said, "the time has come for me to settle the question of my residence."

Now the house at Twickenham was the property of the present baronet, but Lady Ball had a jointure of five hundred a year out of her late husband's estate. It had always been intended that the mother should continue to live with her son and grandchildren in the very probable event of her being left a widow; and it was felt by them all that their means were not large enough to permit, with discretion, separate households; but Lady Ball had declared more than once with extreme vehemence that nothing should induce her to live at the Cedars if Margaret Mackenzie should be made mistress of the house.

"Has the time come especially to-day?" he asked in reply.

"I think we may say it has come especially to-day. We know now that you have got this increase to your income, and nothing is any longer in doubt that we cannot ourselves settle. I need not say that my dearest wish is to remain here, but you know my mind upon that subject."

"I cannot see any possible reason for your going."

"Nor can I,—except the one. I suppose you know yourself what you mean to do about your cousin. Everybody knows what you ought to

do after the disgraceful things that have been put into all the newspapers."

"That has not been Margaret's fault."

"I am by no means so sure of that. Indeed, I think it has been her fault; and now she has made herself notorious by being at this bazaar, and by having herself called a ridiculous name by everybody. Nothing will make me believe but what she likes it."

"You are ready to believe any evil of her, mother; and yet it is not two years since you yourself wished me to marry her."

"Things are very different since that;—very different, indeed. And I did not know her then as I do now, or I should never have thought of such a thing, let her have had all the money in the world. She had not misbehaved herself then with that horrible curate."

"She has not misbehaved herself now," said the son, in an angry voice.

"Yes, she has, John," said the mother, in a voice still more angry.

"That's a matter for me to judge. She has not misbehaved herself in my eyes. It is a great misfortune,—a great misfortune for us both,—the conduct of this man; but I won't allow it to be said that it was her fault."

"Very well. Then I suppose I may arrange to go. I did not think, John, that I should be

turned out of your father's house so soon after your father's death. I did not indeed."

Thereupon Lady Ball got out her handkerchief, and her son perceived that real tears were running down her face.

"Nobody has ever spoken of your going except yourself, mother."

"I won't live in the house with her."

"And what would you have me do? Would you wish me to let her go her way and starve by herself?"

"No, John; certainly not. I think you should see that she wants for nothing. She could live with her sister-in-law, and have the interest of the money that the Rubbs took from her. It was your money."

"I have explained to you over and over again, mother, that that has already been made over to Mrs. Tom Mackenzie; and that would not have been at all sufficient. Indeed, I have altogether made up my mind upon that. When the lawyers and all the expenses are paid, there will still be about eight hundred a year. I shall share it with her."

"John!"

"That is my intention; and therefore if I were to marry her I should get an additional income of four hundred a year for myself and my children."

"You don't mean it, John."

"Indeed I do, mother. I'm sure the world would expect me to do as much as that."

"The world expect you! And are you to rob your children, John, because the world expects it? I never heard of such a thing. Give away four hundred a year merely because you are afraid of those wretched newspapers! I did expect you would have more courage."

"If I do not do one, mother, I shall do the other certainly."

"Then I must beg you to tell me which you mean to do. If you give her half of all that is coming to you, of course I must remain here because you could not live here without me. Your income would be quite insufficient. But you do owe it me to tell me at once what I am to do."

To this her son made no immediate answer, but sat with his elbow on the table, and his head upon his hand looking moodily at the fireplace. He did not wish to commit himself if he could possibly avoid it.

"John, I must insist upon an answer," said his mother. "I have a right to expect an answer."

"You must do what you like, mother, independently of me. If you think you can live here on your income, I will go away, and you shall have the place."

"That's nonsense, John. Of course you

want a large house for the children, and if I must be alone, I shall only want one room for myself. What should I do with the house?"

Then there was silence again for a while.

"I will give you a final answer on Saturday," he said at last. "I shall see Margaret before Saturday."

After that he took his candle and went to bed. It was then Tuesday, and Lady Ball was obliged at be contented with the promise thus made to her.

On the Wednesday he did nothing. On the Thursday morning he received a letter which nearly drove him mad. It was addressed to him at the office of the Shadrach Fire Insurance Company, and it reached him there. It was as follows :—

"Littlebath, — June, 186—.

"Sir,—You are no doubt fully aware of all the efforts which I have made during the last six months to secure from your grasp the fortune which did belong to my dear,—my dearest friend, Margaret Mackenzie. For as my dearest friend I shall ever regard her, though she and I have been separated by machinations of the nature of which she, as I am fully sure, has never been aware. I now ascertain that some of the inferior law courts have, under what pressure I know not, set aside the will which was made twenty

years ago in favour of the Mackenzie family, and given to you the property which did belong to them. That a superior court would reverse the judgment, I believe there is little doubt; but whether or no the means exist for me to bring the matter before the higher tribunals of the country I am not yet aware. Very probably I may have no such power, and in such case, Margaret Mackenzie is, to-day, through your means, a beggar.

"Since this matter has been before the public you have ingeniously contrived to mitigate the wrath of public opinion by letting it be supposed that you purposed to marry the lady whose wealth you were seeking to obtain by legal quibbles. You have made your generous intentions very public, and have created a romance that has been, I must say, but little becoming to your age. If all be true that I heard when I last saw Miss Mackenzie at Twickenham, you have gone through some ceremony of proposing to her. But, as I understand, that joke is now thought to have been carried far enough; and as the money is your own, you intend to enjoy yourself as a lion, leaving the lamb to perish in the wilderness.

"Now I call upon you to assert, under your own name and with your own signature, what are your intentions with reference to Margaret

Mackenzie. Her property, at any rate for the present, is yours. Do you intend to make her your wife, or do you not? And if such be your intention, when do you purpose that the marriage shall take place, and where?

"I reserve to myself the right to publish this letter and your answer to it; and of course shall publish the fact if your cowardice prevents you from answering it. Indeed nothing shall induce me to rest in this matter till I know that I have been the means of restoring to Margaret Mackenzie the means of decent livelihood.

"I have the honour to be, Sir,

"Your very humble servant,

"JEREMIAH MAGUIRE.

"Sir John Ball, Bart., &c. &c.,

"Shadrach Fire Office."

Sir John, when he had read this, was almost wild with agony and anger. He threw up his hands with dismay as he walked along the passages of the Shadrach Office, and fulminated mental curses against the wasp that was able to sting him so deeply. What should he do to the man? As for answering the letter, that was of course out of the question; but the reptile would carry out his threat of publishing the letter, and then the whole question of his marriage would be discussed in the public prints. An idea came

across him that a free press was bad and rotten from the beginning to the end. This creature was doing him a terrible injury, was goading him almost to death, and yet he could not punish him. He was a clergyman, and could be beaten and kicked, or even fired at with a pistol. As for prosecuting the miscreant, had not his own lawyer told him over and over again, that such a prosecution was the very thing which the miscreant desired? And then the additional publicity of such a prosecution, and the twang of false romance which would follow, and the horrid alliteration of the story of the two beasts, and all the ridicule of the incidents, crowded upon his mind, and he walked forth from the Shadrach Office among the throngs of the city a wretched and almost despairing man.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FRIEND IN NEED IS A FRIEND INDEED.

When the work of the bazaar was finished all the four Mackenzie ladies went home to Mrs. Mackenzie's house in Cavendish Square, very tired, eager for tea, and resolved that nothing more should be done that evening. There should be no dressing for dinner, no going out, nothing but idleness, tea, lamb chops, and gossip about the day's work. Mr. Mackenzie was down at the House, and there was no occasion for any domestic energy. And thus the evening was passed. How Mrs. Chaucer Munro and the loud bevy fared among them, or how old Lady Ware and her daughters, or the poor, dear, bothered duchess, or Mr. Manfred Smith, or the kings and heroes who had appeared in paint and armour, cannot here be told. I fear that the Mackenzie verdict about the bazaar in general was not favourable, and that they agreed among them-

selves to abstain from such enterprises of charity in future. It concerns us now chiefly to know that our Griselda held up her head well throughout that evening, and made herself comfortable and at her ease among her cousins, although it was already known to her that the legal decision had gone against her in the great case of Ball *v.* Mackenzie. But had that decision been altogether in her favour, the result would not have been so favourable to her spirits, as had been that little speech made by Mrs. Mackenzie as to her having no right as yet to scold Sir John for his extravagance;—that little speech made in good humour, and apparently accepted in good humour even by him. But on that evening Mrs. Mackenzie was not able to speak to Margaret about her prospects, or to lecture her on the expediency of regarding the nicenesses of her dress in Sir John's presence, because of the two other cousins. The two other cousins, no doubt, knew all the story of the Lion and the Lamb, and talked to their sister-in-law, Clara, of their other cousin, Griselda, behind Griselda's back; and were no doubt very anxious that Griselda should become a baronet's wife; but among so large a party there was no opportunity for confidential advice.

On the next morning Mrs. Mackenzie and Margaret were together, and then Mrs. Mackenzie began:

"Margaret, my dear," said she, "that bonnet I gave you has been worth its weight in gold."

"It cost nearly as much," said Margaret, "for it was very expensive and very light."

"Or in bank-notes either, because it has shown him and me and everybody else that you needn't be a dowdy unless you please. No man wishes to marry a dowdy, you know."

"I suppose I was a dowdy when he asked me."

"I wasn't there, and didn't know you then, and can't say. But I do know that he liked the way you looked yesterday. Now, of course, he'll be coming here before long."

"I dare say he won't come here again the whole summer."

"If he did not, I should send for him."

"Oh, Mrs. Mackenzie!"

"And oh, Griselda! Why should I not send for him? You don't suppose I'm going to let this kind of thing go on from month to month, till that old woman at the Cedars has contrived to carry her point. Certainly not."

"Now that the matter is settled, of course, I shall not go on staying here."

"Not after you're married, my dear. We couldn't well take in Sir John and all the children. Besides, we shall be going down to Scotland for the grouse. But I mean you shall

be married out of this house. Don't look so astonished. Why not? There's plenty of time before the end of July."

"I don't think he means anything of the kind; I don't indeed."

"Then he must be the queerest man that ever I met; and I should say about the falsest and most heartless also. But whether he means to do that or does not, he must mean to do something. You don't suppose he'll take all your fortune away from you, and then leave you without coming to say a word to you about it? If you had disputed the matter, and put him to all manner of expense; if, in short, you had been enemies through it all, that might have been possible. But you have been such a veritable lamb, giving your fleece to the shearer so meekly,—such a true Griselda, that if he were to leave you in that way, no one would ever speak to him again."

"But you forget Lady Ball."

"No, I don't. He'll have a disagreeable scene with his mother, and I don't pretend to guess what will be the end of that; but when he has done with his mother, he'll come here. He must do it. He has no alternative. And when he does come, I want you to look your best. Believe me, my dear, there would be no muslins in the world and no starch, if it was not intended

that people should make themselves look as nice as possible."

"Young people," suggested Margaret.

"Young people, as you call them, can look well without muslin and without starch. Such things were intended for just such persons as you and me; and as for me, I make it a rule to take the goods the gods provide me."

Mrs. Mackenzie's philosophy was not without its result, and her prophecy certainly came true. A few days passed by and no lover came, but early on the Friday morning after the bazaar, Margaret, who at the moment was in her own room, was told that Sir John was below in the drawing-room with Mrs. Mackenzie. He had already been there some little time, the servant said, and Mrs. Mackenzie had sent up with her love to know if Miss Mackenzie would come down. Would she go down? Of course she would go to her cousin. She was no coward. Indeed, a true Griselda can hardly be a coward. So she made up her mind to go to her cousin and hear her fate.

The last four-and-twenty hours had been very bitter with Sir John Ball. What was he to do, walking about with that man's letter in his pocket,—with that reptile's venom still curdling through his veins? On that Thursday morning, as he went towards his office, he had made up

his mind, as he thought, to go to Margaret and bid her choose her own destiny. She should become his wife, or have half of Jonathan Ball's remaining fortune, as she might herself elect. "She refused me," he said to himself, "when the money was all hers. Why should she wish to come to such a house as mine, to marry a dull husband and undertake the charge of a lot of children? She shall choose herself." And then he thought of her as he had seen her at the bazaar, and began to flatter himself that, in spite of his dulness and his children, she would choose to become his wife. He was making some scheme as to his mother's life, proposing that two of his girls should live with her, and that she should be near to him, when the letter from Mr. Maguire was put into his hands.

How was he to marry his cousin after that? If he were to do so, would not that wretch at Littlebath declare, through all the provincial and metropolitan newspapers, that he had compelled the marriage? That letter would be published in the very column that told of the wedding. But yet he must decide. He must do something. They who read this will probably declare that he was a weak fool to regard anything that such a one as Mr. Maguire could say of him. He was not a fool, but he was so far weak and foolish; and in such matters

such men are weak and foolish, and often cowardly.

It was, however, absolutely necessary that he should do something. He was as well aware as was Mrs. Mackenzie that it was essentially his duty to see his cousin, now that the question of law between them had been settled. Even if he had no thought of again asking her to be his wife, he could not confide to any one else the task of telling her what was to be her fate. Her conduct to him in the matter of the property had been exemplary, and it was incumbent on him to thank her for her generous forbearance. He had pledged himself also to give his mother a final answer on Saturday.

On the Friday morning, therefore, he knocked at the Mackenzies' house door in Cavendish Square, and soon found himself alone with Mrs. Mackenzie. I do not know that even then he had come to any fixed purpose. What he would himself have preferred would have been permission to postpone any action as regarded his cousin for another six months, and to have been empowered to use that time in crushing Mr. Maguire out of existence. But this might not be so, and therefore he went to Cavendish Square that he might there decide his fate.

"You want to see Margaret, no doubt," said Mrs. Mackenzie, "that you may tell her that her

ruin is finally completed;" and as she thus spoke of her cousin's ruin, she smiled her sweetest smile and put on her pleasantest look.

"Yes, I do want to see her presently," he said.

Mrs. Mackenzie had stood up as though she were about to go in quest of her cousin, but had sat down again when the word presently was spoken. She was by no means averse to having a few words of conversation about Margaret, if Sir John should wish it. Sir John, I fear, had merely used the word through some instinctive idea that he might thereby stave off the difficulty for a while.

"Don't you think she looked very well at the bazaar?" said Mrs. Mackenzie.

"Very well, indeed," he answered; "very well. I can't say I liked the place."

"Nor any of us, I can assure you. Only one must do that sort of thing sometimes, you know. Margaret was very much admired there. So much has been said of this singular story about her fortune, that people have, of course, talked more of her than they would otherwise have done."

"That has been a great misfortune," said Sir John, frowning.

"It has been a misfortune, but it has been one of those things that can't be helped. I don't think you have any cause to complain, for Mar-

garet has behaved as no other woman ever did behave, I think. Her conduct has been perfect."

"I don't complain of her."

"As for the rest, you must settle that with the world yourself. I don't care for any one beyond her. But, for my part, I think it is the best to let those things die away of themselves. After all, what does it matter as long as one does nothing to be ashamed of oneself? People can't break any bones by their talking."

"Wouldn't you think it very unpleasant, Mrs. Mackenzie, to have your name brought up in the newspapers?"

"Upon my word I don't think I should care about it as long as my husband stood by me. What is it after all? People say that you and Margaret are the Lion and the Lamb. What's the harm of being called a lamb or a lion either? As long as people are not made to believe that you have behaved badly, that you have been false or cruel, I can't see that it comes to much. One does not, of course, wish to have newspaper articles written about one."

"No, indeed."

"But they can't break your bones, nor can they make the world think you dishonest, as long as you take care that you are honest. Now, in this matter, I take it for granted that you and Margaret are going to make a match of it ——."

"Has she told you so?"

Mrs. Mackenzie paused a moment to collect her thoughts before she answered; but it was only for a moment, and Sir John Ball hardly perceived that she had ceased to speak.

"No," she said; "she has not told me so. But I have told her that it must be so."

"And she does not wish it?"

"Do you want me to tell a lady's secret? But in such a case as this the truth is always the best. She does wish it, with all her heart,—as much as any woman ever wished for anything. You need have no doubt about her loving you."

"Of course, Mrs. Mackenzie, I should take care in any case that she were provided for amply. If a single life will suit her best, she shall have half of all that she ever thought to be her own."

"And do you wish it to be so?"

"I have not said that, Mrs. Mackenzie. But it may be that I should wish her to have the choice fairly in her own power."

"Then I can tell you at once which she would choose. Your offer is very generous. It is more than generous. But, Sir John, a single life will not suit her; and my belief is, that were you to offer her the money without your hand, she would not take a farthing of it."

"She must have some provision."

"She will take none from you but the one, and you need be under no doubt whatsoever that she will take that without a moment's doubt as to her own future happiness. And, Sir John, I think you would have the best wife that I know anywhere among my acquaintance." Then she stopped, and he sat silent, making no reply. "Shall I send to her now?" said Mrs. Mackenzie.

"I suppose you might as well," said Sir John.

Then Mrs. Mackenzie got up and left the room, but she did not herself go up to her cousin. She felt that she could not see Margaret without saying something of what had passed between herself and Sir John, and that it would be better that nothing should be said. So she went away to her own room, and despatched her maid to send the lamb to the lion. Nevertheless, it was not without compunction, some twang of feminine conscience, that Mrs. Mackenzie gave up this opportunity of saying some last important word, and perhaps doing some last important little act with regard to those nicenesses of which she thought perhaps too much. Mrs. Mackenzie's philosophy was not without its truth; but a man of fifty should not be made to marry a woman by muslin and starch, if he be not prepared to marry her on other considerations.

When the message came, Margaret thought

nothing of the muslin and starch. The bonnet that had been worth its weight in gold, and the black-freckled dress, were all forgotten. But she thought of the words which her cousin John had spoken to her as soon as they had got through the little gate into the grounds of the Cedars when they had walked back together from the railway station at Twickenham; and she remembered that she had then pledged herself to be firm. If he alluded to the offer he had then made, and repeated it, she would throw herself into his arms at once, and tell him that she would serve him with all her heart and all her strength as long as God might leave them together. But she was quite as strongly determined to accept from him for herself no other kind of provision. That money which for a short while had been hers was now his; and she could have no claim upon him unless he gave her the claim of a wife. After what had passed between them she would not be the recipient of his charity. Certain words had been written and spoken fron which she had gathered the existence, in Mr. Slow's mind, of some such plan as this. His client should lose her cause meekly and graciously, and should then have a claim for alms. That had been the idea on which Mr. Slow had worked. She had long made up her mind that Mr. Slow should be taught to know her better, if the day

for such offering of alms should ever come. Perhaps it had come now. She took up a little scarf that she wore ordinarily and folded it tight across her shoulders, quite forgetful of muslin and starch, as she descended to the drawing-room in order that this question might be solved for her.

Sir John met her almost at the door as she entered.

"I'm afraid you've been expecting me to come sooner," he said.

"No, indeed; I was not quite sure that you would come at all."

"Oh, yes; I was certain to come. You have hardly received as yet any official notification that your cause has been lost."

"It was not my cause, John," she said, smiling, "and I received no other notification than what I got through Mrs. Mackenzie. Indeed, as you know, I have regarded this law business as nonsense all through. Since what you and Mr. Slow told me, I have known that the property was yours."

"But it was quite necessary to have a judgment."

"I suppose so, and there's an end of it. I, for one, am not in the least disappointed,—if it will give you any comfort to know that."

"I don't believe that any other woman in

England would have lost her fortune with the equanimity that you have shown."

She could not explain to him that, in the first days of dismay caused by that misfortune, he had given her such consolation as to make her forget her loss, and that her subsequent misery had been caused by the withdrawal of that consolation. She could not tell him that the very memory of her money had been, as it were, drowned by other hopes in life,—by other hopes and by other despair. But when he praised her for her equanimity, she thought of this. She still smiled as she heard his praise.

"I suppose I ought to return the compliment," she said, "and declare that no cousin who had been kept so long out of his own money ever behaved so well as you have done. I can assure you that I have thought of it very often,—of the injustice that has been involuntarily done to you."

"It has been unjust, has it not?" said he, piteously, thinking of his injuries. "So much of it has gone in that oilcloth business, and all for nothing!"

"I'm glad at any rate that Walter's share did not go."

He knew that this was not the kind of conversation which he had desired to commence, and that it must be changed before anything

could be settled. So he shook himself and began again.

"And now, Margaret, as the lawyers have finished their part of the business, ours must begin."

She had been standing hitherto and had felt herself to be strong enough to stand, but at the sound of these words her knees had become weak under her, and she found a retreat upon the sofa. Of course she said nothing as he came and stood over her.

"I hope you have understood," he continued, "that while all this was going on I could propose no arrangement of any kind."

"I know you have been very much troubled."

"Indeed I have. It seems that any blackguard has a right to publish any lies that he likes about any one in any of the newspapers, and that nobody can do anything to protect himself! Sometimes I have thought that it would drive me mad."

But he again perceived that he was getting out of the right course in thus dwelling upon his own injuries. He had come there to alleviate her misfortunes, not to talk about his own.

"It is no good, however, talking about all that; is it, Margaret?"

"It will cease now, will it not?"

"I cannot say. I fear not. Whichever way

I turn, they abuse me for what I do. What business is it of theirs?"

"You mean their absurd story,—calling you a lion."

"Don't talk of it, Margaret."

Then Margaret was again silent. She by no means wished to talk of the story, if he would only leave it alone.

"And now about you."

Then he came and sat beside her, and she put her hand back behind the cushion on the sofa so as to save herself from trembling in his presence. She need not have cared much, for, let her tremble ever so much, he had then no capacity for perceiving it.

"Come, Margaret; I want to do what is best for us both. How shall it be?"

"John, you have children, and you should do what is best for them."

Then there was a pause again, and when he spoke after a while, he was looking down at the floor and poking among the pattern on the carpet with his stick.

"Margaret, when I first asked you to marry me, you refused me."

"I did," said she; "and then all the property was mine."

"But afterwards you said you would have me."

"Yes; and when you asked me the second time I had nothing. I know all that."

"I thought nothing about the money then. I mean that I never thought you refused me because you were rich and took me because you were poor. I was not at all unhappy about that when we were walking round the shrubbery. But when I thought you had cared for that man——"

"I had never cared for him," said Margaret, withdrawing her hand from behind the pillow in her energy, and fearing no longer that she might tremble. "I had never cared for him. He is a false man, and told untruths to my aunt."

"Yes, he is a liar;—a damnable liar. That is true at any rate."

"He is beneath your notice, John, and beneath mine. I will not speak of him."

Sir John, however, had an idea that when he felt the wasp's venom through all his blood, the wasp could not be altogether beneath his notice.

"The question is," said he, speaking between his teeth, and hardly pronouncing his words, "the question is whether you care for me."

"I do," said she turning round upon him, and as she did so our Griselda took both his hands in hers. "I do, John. I do care for you. I love you better than all the world besides. Whom

else have I to love at all? If you choose to think it mean of me, now that I am so poor, I cannot help it. But who was it told me to be firm? Who was it told me? Who was it told me?"

Lady Ball had lost her game, and Mrs. Mackenzie had been a true prophet. Mrs. Mackenzie had been one of those prophets who knew how to assist the accomplishment of their own prophecies, and Lady Ball had played her game with very indifferent skill. Sir John endeavoured to say a word as to that other alternative that he had to offer, but the lamb was not lamb-like enough to listen to it. I doubt even whether Margaret knew, when at night she thought over the affairs of the day, that any such offer had been made to her. During the rest of the interview she was by far the greatest talker, and she would not rest till she had made him swear that he believed her when she said, that both in rejecting him and accepting him, she had been guided simply by her affection. "You know, John," she said, "a woman can't love a man all at once."

They had been together for the best part of two hours, when Mrs. Mackenzie knocked at the door.

"May I come in?"

"Oh, yes," said Margaret.

"And may I ask a question?" She knew by the tone of her cousin's voice that no question could come amiss.

"You must ask him," said Margaret, coming to her and kissing her.

"But, first of all," said Mrs. Mackenzie, shutting the door and assuming a very serious countenance, "I have news of my own to tell. There is a gentleman down-stairs in the dining-room who has sent up word that he wants to see me. He says he is a clergyman."

Then Sir John Ball ceased to smile, and look foolish, but doubled his fist, and went towards the door.

"Who is it?" said Margaret, whispering.

"I have not heard his name, but from the servant's account of him I have not much doubt myself; I suppose he comes from Littlebath. You can go down to him, if you like, Sir John; but I would not advise it."

"No," said Margaret, clinging to his arm, "you shall not go down. What good can you do? He is beneath you. If you beat him he will have the law of you,—and he is a clergyman. If you do not, he will only revile you, and make you wretched." Thus between the two ladies the baronet was restrained.

It was Mr. Maguire. Having learned from his ally, Miss Colza, that Margaret was staying

with her cousins in Cavendish Square, he had resolved upon calling on Mrs. Mackenzie, and forcing his way, if possible, into Margaret's presence. Things were not going well with him at Littlebath, and in his despair he had thought that the best chance to him of carrying on the fight lay in this direction. Then there was a course of embassies between the dining-room and drawing-room in the Mackenzie mansion. The servant was sent to ask the gentleman his name, and the gentleman sent up to say that he was a clergyman;—that his name was not known to Mrs. Mackenzie, but that he wanted to see her most particularly for a few minutes on very special business. Then the servant was despatched to ask him whether or no he was the Rev. Jeremiah Maguire, of Littlebath, and under this compulsion he sent back word that such was his designation. He was then told to go. Upon that he wrote a note to Mrs. Mackenzie, setting forth that he had a private communication to make, much to the advantage of her cousin, Miss Margaret Mackenzie. He was again told to go; and then told again, that if he did not leave the house at once, the assistance of the police would be obtained. Then he went. "And it was frightful to behold him," said the servant, coming up for the tenth time. But the servant no doubt enjoyed the play, and on one occasion presumed

to remark that he did not think any reference to the police was necessary. "Such a game as we've had up!" he said to the coachman that afternoon in the kitchen.

And the game that they had in the drawing-room was not a bad game either. When Mr. Maguire would not go, the two women joined in laughing, till at last the tears ran down Mrs. Mackenzie's face.

"Only think of our being kept prisoners here by a one-eyed clergyman."

"He has got two eyes," said Margaret. "If he had ten he shan't see us."

And at last Sir John laughed; and as he laughed he came and stood near Margaret; and once he got his arm round her waist, and Griselda was very happy. At the present moment she was quite indifferent to Mr. Maguire and any mode of fighting that he might adopt.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

Things had not been going well with Mr. Maguire when, as a last chance, he attempted to force an entrance into Mrs. Mackenzie's drawing-room. Things, indeed, had been going very badly with him. Mr. Stumfold at Littlebath had had an interview with the editor of the Christian Examiner, and had made that provincial Jupiter understand that he must drop the story of the Lion and the Lamb. There had been more than enough of it, Mr. Stumfold thought; and if it were continued, Mr. Stumfold would,—would make Littlebath too hot to hold the Examiner Christian. That was the full meaning of Mr. Stumfold's threat; and, as the editor knew Mr. Stumfold's power, the editor wisely turned a cold shoulder upon Mr. Maguire. When Mr. Maguire came to the editor with his letter for publication, the editor

declared that he should be happy to insert it —as an advertisement. Then there had been a little scene between Mr. Maguire and the editor, and Mr. Maguire had left the editorial office shaking the dust from off his feet. But he was a persistent man, and, having ascertained that Miss Colza was possessed of some small share in her brother's business in the city, he thought it expedient to betake himself again to London. He did so, as we have seen; and with some very faint hope of obtaining collateral advantage for himself, and some stronger hope that he might still be able to do an injury to Sir John Ball, he went to the Mackenzies' house in Cavendish Square. There his success was not great; and from that time forward the wasp had no further power of inflicting stings upon the lion whom he had persecuted.

But some further annoyance he did give to Griselda. He managed to induce Mrs. Tom Mackenzie to take him in as a lodger in Gower Street, and Margaret very nearly ran into his way in her anxiety to befriend her sister-in-law. Luckily she heard from Mr. Rubb that he was there on the very day on which she had intended to visit Gower Street. Poor Mrs. Mackenzie got the worst of it; for of course Mr. Maguire did not pay for his lodgings. But he did marry Miss Colza, and in some way got himself insti-

tuted to a chapel at Islington. There we will leave him, not trusting much in his connubial bliss, but faintly hoping that his teaching may be favourable to the faith and morals of his new flock.

Of Mr. Samuel Rubb, junior, we must say a few words. His first acquaintance with our heroine was not made under circumstances favourable to him. In that matter of the loan, he departed very widely from the precept which teaches us that honesty is the best policy. And when I feel that our Margaret was at one time really in danger of becoming Mrs. Rubb,—that in her ignorance of the world, in the dark gropings of her social philosophy, amidst the difficulties of her solitude, she had not known whether she could do better with herself and her future years than give herself, and them, and her money to Mr. Samuel Rubb, I tremble as I look back upon her danger. It has been said of women that they have an insane desire for matrimony. I believe that the desire, even if it be as general as is here described, is no insanity. But when I see such a woman as Margaret Mackenzie in danger from such a man as Samuel Rubb, junior, I am driven to fear that there may sometimes be a maniacal tendency. But Samuel Rubb was by no means a bad man. He first hankered after the woman's money, but

afterwards he had loved the woman; and my female reader, if she agrees with me, will feel that that virtue covers a multitude of sins.

And he was true to the promise that he made about the loan. He did pay the interest of the money regularly to Mrs. Mackenzie in Gower Street, and after a while was known in that house as the recognized lover of Mary Jane, the eldest daughter. In this way it came to pass that he occasionally saw the lady to whose hand he had aspired; for Margaret, when she was assured that Mr. Maguire and his bride were never likely to be seen in that locality, did not desert her nephews and nieces in Gower Street.

But we must go back to Sir John Ball. As soon as the coast was clear in Cavendish Square, he took his leave of Margaret. Mrs. Mackenzie had left the room, desiring to speak a word to him alone as he came down.

"I shall tell my mother to-night," he said to Margaret. "You know that all this is not exactly as she wishes it."

"John," she said, "if it is as you wish it, I have no right to think of anything beyond that."

"It is as I wish it," said he.

"Then tell my aunt, with my love, that I shall hope that she will receive me as her daughter."

Then they parted, and Margaret was left alone to congratulate herself over her success.

"Sir John," said Mrs. Mackenzie, calling him into the drawing-room; "you must hear my congratulations; you must, indeed."

"Thank you," said he, looking foolish; "you are very good."

"And so is she. She is what you may really call good. She is as good as gold. I know a woman when I see her; and I know that for one like her there are fifty not fit to hold a candle to her. She has nothing mean or little about her,—nothing. They may call her a lamb, but she can be a lioness too when there is an occasion."

"I know that she is steadfast," said he.

"That she is, and honest, and warm-hearted; and—and—— Oh! Sir John, I am so happy that it is all to be made right, and nice, and comfortable. It would have been very sad if she hadn't gone with the money; would it not?"

"I should not have taken the money,—not all of it."

"And she would not have taken any. She would not have taken a penny of it, though we need not mind that now; need we? But there is one thing I want to say; you must not think I am interfering."

"I shan't think that after all that you have done."

"I want her to be married from here. It would be quite proper; wouldn't it? Mr. Mackenzie is a little particular about the grouse, because there is to be a large party at Incharrow; but up to the 10th of August you and she should fix any day you liked."

Sir John showed by his countenance that he was somewhat taken aback. The 10th of August, and here they were far advanced into June! When he had left home this morning he had not fully made up his mind whether he meant to marry his cousin or not; and now, within a few hours, he was being confined to weeks and days! Mrs. Mackenzie saw what was passing in his mind; but she was not a woman to be driven easily from her purpose.

"You see," she said, "there is so much to think of. What is Margaret to do, if we leave her in London when we go down? And it would really be better for her to be married from her cousin's house; it would, indeed. Lady Ball would like it better,—I'm sure she would,—than if she were to be living alone in the town in lodgings. There is always a way of doing things; isn't there? And Walter's sisters, her own cousins, could be her bridesmaids, you know."

Sir John said that he would think about it.

"I haven't spoken to her, of course," said Mrs. Mackenzie; "but I shall now."

Sir John, as he went eastwards into the city did think about it; and before he had reached his own house that evening, he had brought himself to regard Mrs. Mackenzie's scheme in a favourable light. He was not blind to the advantage of taking his wife from a house in Cavendish Square, instead of from lodgings in Arundel Street; and he was aware that his mother would not be blind to that advantage either. He did not hope to be able to reconcile her to his marriage at once; and perhaps he entertained some faint idea that for the first six months of his new married life the Cedars would be quite as pleasant without his mother as with her; but a final reconciliation would be more easy if he and his wife had the Mackenzies of Incharrow to back them, than it could be without such influence. And as for the London gossip of the thing, the finale to the romance of the Lion and the Lamb, it would be sure to come sooner or later. Let them have their odious joke and have done with it!

"Mother," he said, as soon as he could find himself alone with Lady Ball that day, not waiting for the midnight conference; "mother, I may as well tell you at once. I have proposed to Margaret Mackenzie again to-day."

"Oh! very well."

"And she has accepted me."

"Accepted you! of course she has; jumped

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at the chance, no doubt. What else should a pauper do?"

"Mother, that is ungenerous."

"She did not accept you when she had got anything."

"If I can reconcile myself to that, surely you can do so. The matter is settled now, and I think I have done the best in my power for myself and my children."

"And as for your mother, she may go and die anywhere."

"Mother, that is unfair. As long as I have a house over my head, you shall share it, if you please to do so. If it suits you to go elsewhere, I will be with you as often as may be possible. I hope, however, you will not leave us."

"That I shall certainly do."

"Then I hope that you will not go far from me."

"And when is it to be?" said his mother, after a pause.

"I cannot name any day; but some time before the 10th of August."

"Before the 10th of August! Why, that is at once. Oh! John; and your father not dead a year!"

"Margaret has a home now with her cousins in Cavendish Square; but she cannot stay there after they go to Scotland. It will be for her

welfare that she should be married from their house. And as for my father's death, I know that you do not suspect me of disrespect to his memory."

And in this way it was settled at the Cedars; and his mother's question about the time drove him to the resolution which he himself had not reached. When next he was in Cavendish Square he asked Margaret whether she could be ready so soon, and she replied that she would be ready on any day that he told her to be ready.

Thus it was settled, and with a moderate amount of nuptial festivity the marriage feast was prepared in Mrs. Mackenzie's house. Margaret was surprised to find how many dear friends she had who were interested in her welfare. Miss Baker wrote to her most affectionately; and Miss Todd was warm in her congratulations. But the attention which perhaps surprised her most was a warm letter of sisterly affection from Mrs. Stumfold, in which that lady rejoiced with an exceeding joy in that the machinations of a certain wolf in sheep's clothing had been unsuccessful. "My anxiety that you should not be sacrificed I once before evinced to you," said Mrs. Stumfold; "and within the last two months Mr. Stumfold has been at work to put an end to the scurrilous writings which that wolf in sheep's clothing has been putting into the newspapers." Then Mrs.

Stumfold very particularly desired to be remembered to Sir John Ball, and expressed a hope that, at some future time, she might have the honour of being made acquainted with "the worthy baronet."

They were married in the first week in August, and our modern Griselda went through the ceremony with much grace. That there was much grace about Sir John Ball, I cannot say; but gentlemen, when they get married at fifty, are not expected to be graceful.

"There, my Lady Ball," said Mrs. Mackenzie, whispering into her cousin's ear before they left the church; "now my prophecy has come true; and when we meet in London next spring, you will reward me for all I have done for you by walking out of a room before me."

But all these honours, and, what was better, all the happiness that came in her way, Lady Ball accepted thankfully, quietly, and with an enduring satisfaction, as it became such a woman to do.

THE END.

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